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the **AVENGERS**

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"HALLOWEEN 20"
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Volume 30 Number 4



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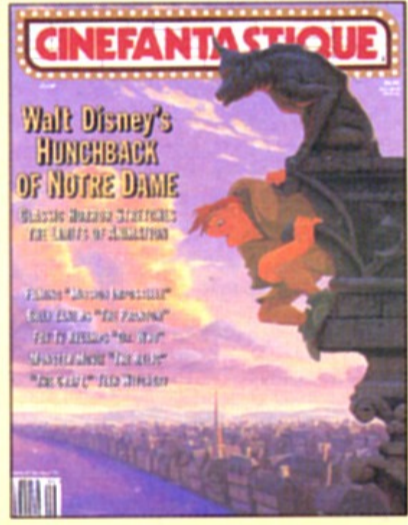
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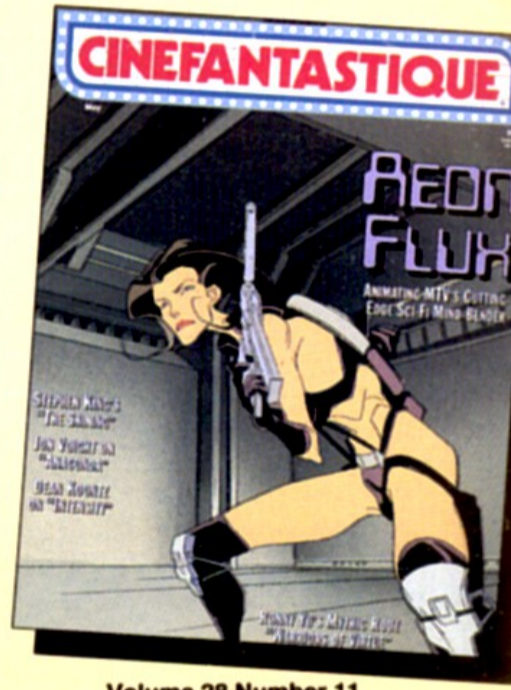
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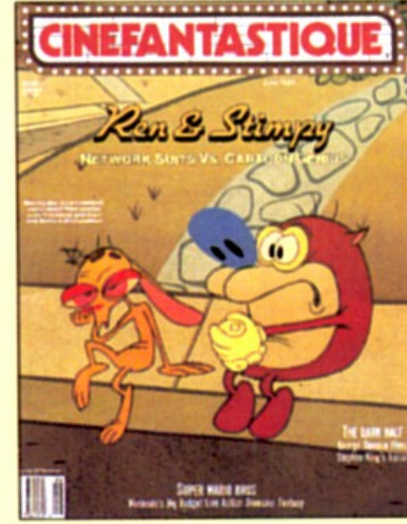
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CONTENTS

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 4

"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

AUGUST 1998

What is the point of a remake? Well, some subjects are so big that it seems as if no one film can ever exhaust the topic completely. Certainly, no one has ever nailed DRACULA or FRANKENSTEIN in a way that could be called definitive, and great actors will always be drawn to the challenge of DR JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE.

But let's face it: Hollywood isn't in the habit of remaking subjects because there is some artistic niche that needs to be filled; they do it because they want to make blockbuster movies, and when you're shelling out budgets that go into nine figures, you want some kind of safety net—such as familiar subject matter that has worked in the past.

But so what if their motives are not altruistic? The bottom line is whether or not they do a good job: do they reimagine the material in a valid way while maintaining the elements that made it popular in the first place? Do they make a film that stands on its own, while honoring the memory of the original?

What brings all this to mind is the contrasting approaches taken by two recent remakes: GODZILLA, which is stomping through theatres now, and THE AVENGERS, which opens this August. Both films were conceived as lavish treatments of topics that previously had to make due with modest budgets. However, whereas GODZILLA is a remake in name only—its roar is about all it has in common with the original—THE AVENGERS actually seems as if it will be faithful to the spirit of the original show. In retrospect, the ID4 duo of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin were far from an ideal choice to remake GODZILLA (their mentality is far more in line with the cartoony DESTROY ALL MONSTERS than the sober original). Although AVENGERS' director Jeremiah Chechick's previous attempt at remaking a classic (DIABOLIQUE), was a botch, perhaps that humbled him enough so that he learned to treat the original with more respect. At least we can expect that THE AVENGERS will be a remake in more than name only.

Steve Biodrowski



Page 7



Page 8



Page 16



Page 18



Page 32

4 RELEASE SCHEDULE: UPCOMING GENRE FILMS

5 HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC: NEWS AND NOTES

7 "HALLOWEEN H20"

John Carpenter explains why he didn't join Jamie Lee Curtis for the 20th anniversary reunion film. / *Interview by John Thonen*

8 "JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES"

The director of HALLOWEEN makes a vampire western, starring James Woods. / *Preview by John Thonen*

10 "DISTURBING BEHAVIOR"

X-FILES alumni get together and try to cash in on the teen horror trend. / *Article by Frank Garcia*

12 "PI"

High-class, low-budget science-fiction filmmaking. / *Interview by Dan Persons*

14 "I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON"

Cult animator Bill Plympton on his new feature film. / *Interview by Dan Persons*

16 "BLADE"

Screenwriter David Goyer on the film's delayed release. / *Interview by James Van Hise*

18 "VIRUS"

Gale Anne Hurd produces an ocean-going TERMINATOR, with Jamie Lee Curtis. / *Articles by Douglas Eby*

30 "CHILDREN OF THE CORN V: FIELDS OF TERROR"

The direct-to-video franchise lives on. / *Article by Michael Beeler*

32 "THE AVENGERS"—THEN AND NOW

Patrick Macnee, Ralph Fiennes, Uma Thurman, and Sean Connery speak. / *Profiles by James Murray, Frederick C. Szebin*

42 THE SCIENCE OF SCREAMS

The author of "Screams of Reason" examines the image of the Mad Scientist in Modern Culture. / *Book excerpt by David J. Skal*

46 "THE SPRIT OF MICKEY"

Fourteen of the famous mouse's best cartoons come out on tape. / *Article by Dan Scapperotti*

50 REVIEWS

The latest on film, video, television, and laserdiscs.

56 FULCI FEVER

Resurrecting Lucio Fulci's cult classic THE BEYOND. / *Article by John Thonen; review by Steve Biodrowski*

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HALLOWEEN COMES EARLY

HALLOWEEN H20 (Dimension)

No, the title does not indicate that the latest HALLOWEEN sequel will be set on or under the ocean. Rather, it is an attempt by Dimension (who like to avoid numerals that indicate just how many previous films there have been) to give an ID4-style spin to what is being billed as a 20th anniversary edition of the franchise. Jamie Lee Curtis (pictured) returns as Laurie Strode. (Yeah, Part IV told us she was dead, but what the hell—you don't seriously think credibility is an issue here, do you?).

SCREAM-writer Kevin Williamson was hired to come up with a treatment (so that the film could be positioned as a follow up to that current franchise rather than the moribund HALLOWEEN series), but he couldn't be bothered to actually write the script. Steve Miner (FRIDAY THE 13TH 3D, HOUSE) directs. With numerous other horror projects skedded for late August or September (DISTURBING BEHAVIOR, BLADE, VAMPIRES, etc), Dimension, encouraged by positive audience test screenings, decided to beat the competition to the punch with an August release. SEE PAGE 7

August 5



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)

ARMAGEDDON (Touchstone)

Now playing

The summer's second cometary collision film is now in theatres. Let's hope it doesn't suffer the same impact as VOLCANO, which was hurt by following an inferior film on a similar subject. Michael Bay (THE ROCK) directed Bruce Willis in this Jerry Bruckheimer production, scripted by Jonathan Hensleigh. SEE CFQ 30:03.

THE AVENGERS (WB)

August 14

Having been delayed from a June 19 debut, this update of the '60s spy show finally reaches the big screen. Ralph Fiennes, Uma Thurman, and Sean Connery star for director Jeremiah Chechik (DIABOLIQUE); Patrick Macnee makes a cameo. SEE PAGE 32.

THE BEYOND

(Rolling Thunder)

Now Playing

Keep your eyes open for midnight screenings of this one in your town. After a seven-city opening on June 12, this 1981 cult item has been expanding into other theatres across the country. SEE PAGE 56.

BLADE (New Line)

August 21

This film was originally supposed to come out in February but was pushed back at the last minute, apparently to allow more time for work on the big CGI finale. Now that John Carpenter's VAMPIRES has landed domestic distribution, New Line probably realized they'd better stop delaying if they wanted to be the first vampire hunter out of the gate. Wesley Snipes stars as the comic book superhero who is half-man, half-vampire. SEE PAGE 16.

CUBE (Trimark)

August/September

This entrancing little geometric gem of a movie abandoned plans for an early summer release in favor of waiting for some of the big-studio blockbusters to fade off the screens. Believe us: it's worth the wait. REVIEWED IN CFQ 30:02

DISTURBING BEHAVIOR (MGM)

August 7

Dimension offered a clear challenge by moving H20 to August 5, but MGM has vowed not to budge their rival teen horror flick: "We have posters up, and we've had trailers in theatres since Memorial Day," said MGM's Larry Gleason. "We're not moving." SEE PAGE 10

EVER AFTER: A CINDERELLA STORY (Fox) August 7

Fox's Family Film division puts out this revisionist take on the beloved fairy tale—you know, the kind where they destroy the whole fabric by psychoanalyzing the characters and portraying the step-mother as being not so much wicked as misunderstood (rather like that ill-conceived SNOW WHITE: A TALE OF TERROR on Showtime). Drew Barrymore stars in the title role, along with Anjelica Huston.

FULL TILT BOOGIE (Miramax) July 31

Sarah Kelly's documentary chronicles the making of FROM DUSK TILL DAWN. Although that misfired collaboration between Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez has already received more coverage than it deserves, this film has gotten good notices for its humorous behind-the-scenes portrayal of the cast and crew's efforts on the wacky vampire flick. Rodriguez, Tarantino, George Clooney, and Juliette Lewis are all on hand to describe their experiences.

I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON (Lion's Gate) July-August

Bill Plympton, whose short films have been the highlight of both Spike and Mike's Festival of Sick and Twisted Animation and General Chaos: Uncensored Animation, releases his second feature film (the first was THE TUNE). The film will tour the same upscale art houses where you've seen his short subjects. SEE PAGE 14

π (Live) July 10

After debuting exclusively in New York and Los Angeles on July 10, this independent film will spread throughout the art-house circuit, acting as a sort of intellectual counter-programming to the studio's summer behemoths. Hopefully, potential viewers will know how to pronounce the title (*Pi*) when trying to buy a ticket. SEE PAGES 12 & 51.

VIRUS (Universal) early 1999

When HALLOWEEN H20 moved up to August 5, Universal had second thoughts about releasing what would be the second Jamie Lee Curtis genre item that month. Intimidated by Dimension's David, the big studio Goliath retreated, opting for a debut early next year. SEE PAGE 18.



TOY STORY

SMALL SOLDIERS (DreamWorks)

Universal and DreamWorks combine forces on this film, which asks: what would happen if toy technology took on military intelligence? What if action figures took their jobs a little too seriously? That's the premise of this co-production between DreamWorks and Universal, which tells the story of an all-out war between the Gorgonites, a small but intrepid band of monstrous-looking creatures, and the war-loving Commando Elite, led by Major Chip Hazard (voiced by Tommy Lee Jones). But this is not some alien battlefield; this is Suburbia, U.S.A.—and the soldiers are prototypes of the most advanced action figures ever created. Blending live action with state-of-the-art computer animation, SMALL SOLDIERS features animatronic designs and effects from Stan Winston's Studio, augmented by CGI work from ILM. Directed by Joe Dante, the cast includes Kirsten Dunst, Phil Hartman, Ann Magnuson, Denis Leary, and Frank Langella as the voice of "Archer." (What? No Dick Miller?) The script is by Gavin Scott, Adam Rifkin, and Ted Elliot & Terry Rossio.

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July 10



HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

T-REX

Imax's latest 3D extravaganza will take you "Back to the Cretaceous."

by Dan Scapperotti

Godzilla may be trampling across theatre screens this Summer; but, come the Fall, he will meet his match when a group of prehistoric creatures leap out of the six-story Imax screens in all their 3D glory. The latest addition to the Imax canon is **T-REX: BACK TO THE CRETACEOUS**. Brett Leonard—the director of **LAWN-MOWER MAN**, **VIRTUOSITY** and **HIDEAWAY**—helms the new 45-minute 3D film. Ally Hayden, a young girl played by newcomer Liz Stauber, is fascinated by the study of dinosaurs, a trait she inherited from her father, world famous paleontologist Donald Hayden (Peter Horton). Ally is desperate to prove that the prehistoric giants were actually the ancestors of today's birds. When her father returns from a dig with a new fossil, Ally hopes it is the egg of a tyrannosaurus. An accident sends the fossil crashing onto the floor emitting a strange gas. The girl wanders into the museum where the skeleton of a T-Rex suddenly grows skin and comes to life. Ally is hurtled back in time. Looking up she sees a Pteranodon as it flies through the Cretaceous sky while a herd of



The dinosaurs in **T-REX** will have to be photographically superior to those in **JURASSIC PARK** (above) in order to hold up in the colossal Imax 3D format.

Hadrosaurs quench their thirst near a glacial lake. The girl is mysteriously back in the present again only to be confronted by a Deinonychus which springs to life out of a Charles Knight painting and her adventures begin again.

To film this fanciful mini-feature, the large Imax cameras, which

process two strips of 70mm film simultaneously, were lugged into the Olympic rain forests of northern Washington state for the primeval forest sequences and then up to Alberta, Canada where the Royal Tyrell museum and Dinosaur Provincial Park provided additional locations.

L-Squared Entertainment, co-owned by Leonard and Michael Lewis, is doing all the visual effects. Not only do the 3D dinosaurs have to look as real as possible three feet from your face, but since several museums house Imax theatres, they had to be paleontologically correct, adding to Leonard's challenge. "It's like **JURASSIC PARK**," said Leonard. "The effects are very similar in nature in terms of the actors interacting with dinosaurs. The story line is very different. This is more like **ALICE IN WONDERLAND** crossed with **JURASSIC PARK**. It's more the mystical experience of going back to the Cretaceous Period. There's no stylization. It's all photo real. We have to be more real than **JURASSIC PARK** because it's much bigger, and the detail used in Imax is much greater." □

Short Notes

Gabriel Byrne and **Patricia Arquette** have signed for the leads in producer Frank Mancuso, Jr.'s supernatural thriller, **TOBY'S STORY**, about a Vatican investigator looking into the case of a young woman experiencing stigmata and other phenomena. ♣ **Antonio Banderas** (**INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE**) is up for the lead in the filming of **Andrew Lloyd Webber's** musical **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**. ♣ The big-screen **SPIDERMAN** remains tangled in a legal web. Just when it seemed that the various rights to the project had been sorted out to allow self-proclaimed King of the World **James Cameron** to make the film, Marvel Entertainment Group (who own the comic book character) sued, claiming that all previous film rights have expired and reverted back to them. ♣ After the disastrous box office performance of the second **TALES FROM THE CRYPT** movie, **BORDELLO OF BLOOD**, Universal has given up on the film franchise, but Miramax, ever ready to milk a property long after its death, has agreed to handle future films. No specific project has yet been selected as the next film. ♣ **Gus Van Zant** (**GOOD WILL HUNTING**) is preparing to direct a new version of **PSYCHO**, from Alfred Hitchcock's own shooting script, penned by **Joseph Stefano** from the novel by Robert Bloch. Other than color film and casting, the film is supposed to be a frame for frame remake. □

Production Starts



CARRIE II

MGM inexplicably hauls this property out of the mothballs in order to make a film that sounds more like a remake of than a sequel to Brian DePalma's 1976 hit. Amy Irving reprises her role, and Paul Monash is back as producer.

BRIDE OF CHUCKY

After the poor reception of **WARRIORS OF VIRTUE**, talented Hong Kong expatriate director Ronny Yu takes on the fourth **CHILD'S PLAY** film. Script is by Chucky creator Don Mancini, with makeup effects by Kevin Yagher. Shooting in Toronto.

eXistenZ

David Cronenberg launches his latest cerebral science-fiction effort, starring Jude Law, Willem Dafoe, Ian Holm, and Sarah Polley.

IDLE HANDS

TriStar pictures bankrolls this horror-comedy from director Rodman Flender, making his big studio debut after countless Roger Corman flicks.

I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze, Jr., return in this teen slasher sequel. Scripter Trey Callaway takes over for Kevin Williamson, and Danny Cannon (**JUDGE DREDD**—uh oh!) directs.

MATRIX

Keanu Reeves returns to science-fiction with this futuristic effort from producer Joel Silver. Larry and Andy Wachowski writer and direct.

MELTDOWN

The action-thriller about a nuclear meltdown finally goes before the cameras with Ate DeJong (**HIGHWAY TO HELL**) at the helm. Previously attached directors John Carpenter and John Dahl get screenplay credits for their contributions. Casper Van Dien (**STARSHIP TROOPERS**) stars.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Shakespeare's fantasy gets a new big screen treatment from writer-director Michael Hoffman. Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Rupert Everett, Stanley Tucci, and Calista Flockhart star.

continued on next page

GEN 13

Director Kevin Alteri on adapting the comic book characters to the big screen.

by David Evans

GEN 13 the comic is about a group of young 20-somethings who unexpectedly get transformed into various kinds of super-powered individuals. Caitlin Fairchild has super-strength and invulnerability. Freefall (aka the young and spunky Roxanne "Roxy" Spaulding) can alter the mass of any object she touches and consequentially, can fly. Grung (aka Percival Edmund Chang, the oft-tattooed surfer dude) has the ability to instantly mimic the molecular structure and therefore the characteristics of any object or person he touches. According to director Kevin Alteri (BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES), the animated feature based on the explosively popular Image



The anatomically astounding Caitlin Fairchild (above) is the star superhero of the animated GEN 13, opposing the seductively sultry villainy of Ivana (left).



comic book series is "loosely based on the first five issues." The plot follows Caitlin Fairchild as she gets a curious offer and is taken to a secret base located somewhere in the desert wasteland of the West, where she meets two other young people, Roxy and Grange. "She thinks it's some kind of ROTC program, which will give her a major educational opportunity that she could not otherwise afford. But the whole thing, she finds out too late, is a clandestine-government operation." Essentially, Alteri likens it to a shadowy and twisted variant of the "Super-Soldier Program" in *Captain America* comics. "She goes from being this virginal, mousy girl and gets transformed into Raquel Welch with the power to crush tanks. She's super-strong like the Incredible Hulk with no upper limits on what she can do."

In Alteri's story a covert agency

had, decades before, recruited fathers of all three kids during the Vietnam War. These men were recreated as super-soldiers. But angered at being manipulated and used by a nation that they'd served in war, the men rebelled and were assassinated. The same agency tracks down the children of these men. "Fairchild and her friends are the next generation, the offspring. The agency thinks that if they go with kids, they'll be more easily controlled. But that thinking turns out to be dead wrong."

That's when the story really comes alive with super-powered action. "These kids have good hearts and they help. They have a sense of honor. They're loyal to their friends and they don't turn their backs on responsibility. Right from the word go you know Caitlin Fairchild is a good person. So, when this government group starts giving her and the other super-powered kids orders, that they know are wrong, they rebel. They're not just weapons who do whatever they're told. They refuse to fight when they don't believe in the cause. Of course, that's when the government attempts to kill them, just like it did their fathers."

The film features an impressive line up of vocal talent. Alice Witt (DUNE) plays the lead role of Caitlin. E.G. Daily (PEE WEE'S

BIG ADVENTURE) plays purple haired punk Roxy. Flea, of The Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's Addiction, plays the hunky surfer boy. John Delance (STAR TREK) will play John Lynch, an ex-intelligence agent who acts as the team's mentor. Cloris Leachman (YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN) uses her infamous Frau Blucher voice to play Helga, the team's stern but motherly drill-instructor. Helga, explains Alteri, was only shown on one page of the original comic. But he liked it so much that he extended the role.

The main villains are Threshold and Ivana. Laura Lane provides the seductively sultry voice of the evil dragon lady Ivana. Mark Hamill, whom Alteri could not stop praising for his work as BATMAN's Joker, will pay Threshold. "They have a clear agenda which only serves their personal needs," Alteri explained. "They'll sacrifice anyone to get what they want, which is power. Ivana's almost an evil politician. She procures black budget money to run a program to create SLB's (Super Powered Beings). With them, she's looking to make herself president of the United States, then absolute dictator."

Disney owns the distribution rights, Alteri said. The PG-13 film (for some blood and violence) will receive a direct-to-video release later this year. □

Obituary

by Jay Stevenson

Leslie Stevens

The creator of the original version of THE OUTER LIMITS died on April 24 of a heart attack at the UCLA Medical Center. He was 74. A writer, director, and producer, Stevens had a wide range of credits on stage (*The Marriage-Go-Round*), television (MCCLOUD) and the big-screen (THE LEFT-HANDED GUN, with Paul Newman). But he earned genre immortality by writing and directing the pilot "Please Stand By," starring Cliff Robertson, which later aired as the first episode of THE OUTER LIMITS, under the revised title "The Galaxy Being." Stevenson went on to executive produce the show with a sense of wonder and intelligence absent from most genre television; in fact, in many ways the show was a precursor to STAR TREK. He also wrote and directed the little-seen feature INGUBUS, with William Shatner, that was filmed in Esperanto; his last feature credit was for co-writing GORDY (1995), a talking pig movie that was lost in the hoopla surrounding BABE. He also received an honorary credit on Showtime's revival of THE OUTER LIMITS, but it is his original show that stands out as one of the great achievements on television, ever. □

continued from previous page

THE MUMMY

Writer-director Stephen Sommers (DEEP RISING) resurrects Universal's classic horror character. Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz star.

STAR TREK 9

Jonathan Frakes directs, from a script by Michael Piller and producer Rick Berman. The usual cast is back, along with F. Murray Abraham and Anthony Zerbe.

SUPERNOVA

After overseeing both the ALIEN and TALES FROM THE CRYPT films as executive producer, Walter Hill finally takes up the reins of a genre film as director. James Spader, Angela Bassett, Robert Forster, and Lou Diamond Phillips star.

UNTITLED RODRIGUEZ - WILLIAMSON PROJECT

Director Robert Rodriguez (FROM DUSK TILL DAWN) and writer Kevin Williamson (SCREAM) collaborate on a little horrific mayhem for their masters at Miramax. Elijah Wood (DEEP IMPACT) stars.

HALLOWEEN

H20

John Carpenter on why the sequel didn't shape up.

1998 marks the 20th anniversary of HALLOWEEN. It also will mark the release of the latest entry in the long-running franchise, Dimension Pictures' HALLOWEEN H20.

However, the big news isn't the inevitable return of Michael Myers, nor is it the return of Jamie Lee Curtis as Laurie Strode. The biggest news surrounding H20 lies with who is not returning: John Carpenter.

Carpenter said that the idea of an anniversary sequel originated with Curtis. Producer Debra Hill "called me up and says that Jamie Lee wants to get together and talk about doing another Halloween, for the 20th anniversary," he recalled. "So Debra, Jamie Lee, and I had a really nice meeting, and we talked about it. Jamie Lee said, 'I've just heard so many things about how much fun you had on ESCAPE FROM L.A., that I'd love to do another movie with you, and I'd love to kick the Shape's ass.'

It's doubtful that it took much arm twisting to lure Dimension's Bob and Harvey Weinstein to the idea; after all, the combined budgets of all six entries in the series barely top \$20 million, yet their combined box office take is over \$200 million. "We met with Bob Weinstein, and he wanted to do it," recalled Carpenter. "He asked me, 'What's the story?' and I had to say, 'I have no idea.' But Jamie was pitching some stories. Now, you have to remember, I'm a little tired. I've been beating the bushes for ESCAPE FROM L.A., and I haven't had a vacation, and I'm the poor son-of-a-bitch that's going to have to write it. And I can just think, *Oh god*. So I've got mixed feelings. Then I hear what the budget's going to be," he laughed.

The plan was to make the film for \$10 million, less than a third the cost of the average motion picture. With the film

BY JOHN
THONEN

likely to garner SCREAM-like box office, the profit potential for Dimension was enormous. "I don't know what they're doing now, but what they wanted at the time was to take a \$3 million pot and have Jamie, Debra and me split it. Jamie'd get a million; Debra would probably get a million; and I'd get a million. So OK, there's nothing wrong with that, but you take my taxes away, that's half of it. Then take my agent's fees and my business manager's fees. I'm not making a whole lot of money—at least not as much as I made on ESCAPE FROM L.A., for instance. And it's going to be a whole lot of work, on a movie that I have mixed feelings about."

While he had both creative and financial misgivings, Carpenter was tempted by the prospect of working with Curtis again. "She's a firecracker; she's fun to work with," he explained. However, he still had too many doubts. "I stewed about it and stewed about it. As much as I'd like to work with Jamie again and have her finally undo the Shape, I thought, *I just can't do it*. I just couldn't find it in my heart to make it. So I passed. I dig the first movie so much. It was so much fun, and I just don't know that I

John Carpenter passed on directing HALLOWEEN H20, after reading a treatment by Kevin Williamson while working on VAMPIRES (below).



Last seen in HALLOWEEN, THE CURSE OF MICHAEL MYERS (above), the Shape stalks again in the anniversary sequel, HALLOWEEN H20.

wanted to revisit that. I can be seduced. I'm not above that. But you must really feather my nest." Carpenter understood the Weinsteins' decision: "It's a sound business decision on their part, and it's their decision to make." He also understood his own: "I get paid every time there's a sequel. They call it passive payment, and I love those words. So I get paid anyway, and I don't have to suffer. Bottom line: I think I would have been creatively suffering. Not from working with Jamie, not from working with Debra, but just from going back to that old ghost of a project again."

Debra Hill also passed, but the sequel now had a momentum of its own. The Weinsteins brought in Kevin Williamson (SCREAM) to come up with a story. "I read a treatment that Williamson had done; I got it while I was doing VAMPIRES. One of the things I'd said was, 'I will be open to this. Let me see what we're going to do, and I'll make a decision.' I read the treatment, and I still wasn't able to overcome my misgivings."

Eventually, the project went into production with Steve Miner (FRIDAY THE 13TH, 3-D), who had directed Curtis in FOREVER YOUNG. As for Carpenter, he turned 50 earlier this year: "Hey, I'm a card-carrying member of the National Association of Retired Persons. I didn't want to work that hard. I just didn't feel that I had to go out and prove anything." □

JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES

**The Undead bite the dust
in this horror-western.**

By John Thonen

JOHN CARPENTER'S *VAMPIRES* tells the story of a band of vampire hunters led by Jack Crow and collectively known as Team Crow. The people behind the film might themselves be described as Team Carpenter. It's an assemblage of frequent cinematic co-conspirators that includes: Sandy King (Carpenter's wife, who produced *IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS* and *VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED*); director of photography Gary Kibbe (*ESCAPE FROM L.A.*); KNB Effects (*IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS*); along with editor Ed Warschilka Jr. and costume designer Robin Michel Bush, each marking their sixth Carpenter film. Stunt coordinator Jeff Imada and supporting cast members Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, Henry Kingi, and Tommy Rosales are also Team Carpenter veterans. Last, but hardly least, is Team Carpenter's film composer: the director himself.

The film began shooting in June 1997 in New Mexico, and wrapped eight weeks later. Carpenter had long wanted to shoot in the area, reportedly attracted to its "Southwest Gothic" look. Production designer Thomas Walsh pointed out that "Gothic is all about angles and points—archways and hands pointed to Heaven. It connects more to superstition than rational thought." Sandy King elaborated, "If you look at the architecture of the Southwest, it harkens back to very old architecture in Italy and Spain: the gates, arches, the block houses. You [can] believe the connection to Europe and can believe that ancient monks and vampires from the old country found their way here."

Carpenter had initially announced his *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* follow-up as Dimension Pictures' sci-fi tale, *THE MUTANT CHRONICLES*. Early in pre-production, the film fell through. When a friend handed Carpenter a copy of John Steakley's 1990



After opening in Europe, *VAMPIRES* secured a deal with Sony for a September 11 release stateside.

novel *Vampire\$*, the director stumbled onto his next film. The book had been optioned for film adaptation since before publication, but it had proven difficult to translate to the screen, despite being an enthralling read. "It really did some things I'd never seen before," Carpenter explained.

The existing script, by Don Jakoby and Dan Mazur, had already greatly simplified Steakley's book. Carpenter's subsequent rewrite took the material even further from its source. Characters were eliminated or combined; subplots were jettisoned in favor of new story elements. The "\$" sign featured in Steakley's title alluded to the vampire's penchant for seducing the rich into their vampiric fold; their wealth would then be used to ensure the eternal safety of the vampire master. Carpenter dropped all of this in favor of a new plot point: the search for The Cross of Berziers. The relic, long hidden by the Catholic church, will give vampires the ability to walk in daylight.

Fans of Steakley's novel immediately took to the Internet to complain about the changes. Rumors of Steakley's dissatisfaction also began to circulate. One website quoted the author as saying, "It's got almost nothing to do with my tale." However, not long after visiting Carpenter's set, Steakley clarified his position. In a letter posted to a website devoted to the author, the somewhat reclusive writer stated, "I am only disappointed in John's script in the sense...well, if I'd have wanted to write that story...I would have written that story. Yet, I do, rather more than a little, like Carpenter's version of vampire hunters. And while I'm at this, I like him."

James Woods plays Jack Crow, who leads Team Crow, a band of vampire hunters.





In the film, vampires find themselves systematically hunted down and exterminated. The special effects for the undead destruction were supervised by Greg Nicotero, of KNB Effects (FROM DUSK TILL DAWN).

While Carpenter changed or abandoned much of Steakley's story, he heightened the elements that first attracted him. "It has all the classic ideas that you've seen in a vampire movie: hidden sexuality, drinking blood," the director explained. "But in essence, I've always loved westerns, and one of the reasons I'm doing this movie is that this is the closest I've come to being able to do a western."

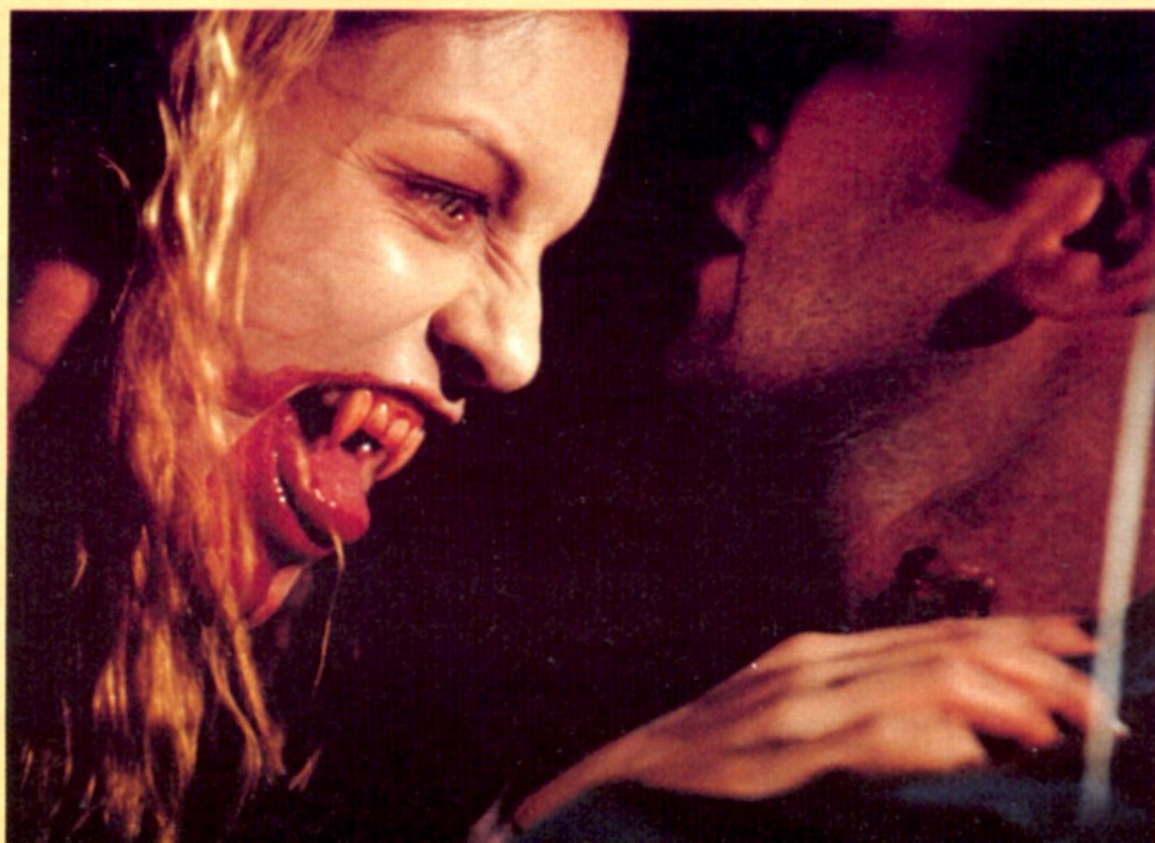
Recent Academy Award-nominee James Woods heads Team Crow in his role as Jack Crow. The intense actor echoed the Team Carpenter view of the film as a modern-day western. "We have set pieces in this movie that are homages to the works of Howard Hawks and Sam Peckinpah," he said. "It's about hunting vampires instead of whoever the bad guys of the day were in classic western cinema." Thomas Ian Griffith, who portrays vampire master Valek, agreed: "The vampire slayers are gunslingers, and the vampires are gunslingers in their own way," he said. "John's taken the western and added dark overtones we haven't seen before."

Despite his remarkably varied career, Woods is probably best known for portraying villains. The same holds true for fellow Team Crow members, Henry Kingi, Cary-Hiroiyuki Tagawa, and Tommy Rosales. Sandy King explained that "It's interesting to have the bad guys be the good guys." Woods elab-

orated, "You like to know that they're hiring real men for the parts—not some 'Hollywood' version of vampire hunters."

On the other side of the coin, Carpenter and King stressed the sensuous and seductive nature of the title creatures. Carpenter explained, "My feeling about vampire movies is that if you don't have sex, it's not a vampire movie." King fully agreed: "From the dawn of mythology, evil has always been alluring. It's no coincidence that our vampire masters are the tallest, most beautiful, most physically agile men and women we could find." 6' 5" martial artist Griffith easily met King's requirements. "Thomas," said King, "exudes a sexuality that can overcome the grave. One of the things I look for in casting is how other people react, and when Thomas walked

Although part Western, the film does not neglect the vampire genre elements, such as hidden sexuality: "If you don't have sex, it's not a vampire movie," said Carpenter.



“It has all the classic ideas you’ve seen in a vampire movie, but I love westerns, and this is the closest I’ve come to doing a western.”

—Director John Carpenter—

through that door, everybody went, 'Whoa!' Men and women alike." Carpenter agreed: "Truly there's no one else who has the power and stature that Thomas has. He is Valek."

Just as Jack Crow inspires unwavering loyalty in his teammates, Carpenter consistently earns the respect of his team. Greg Nicotero, who supervised KNB Effects work on the film, said, "The nice thing about John is that he's a good friend, and that's where it starts from." KNB has worked on a number of vampire films, including *VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN* and *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*. Those films depicted vampire transformations that implied that the creatures were a separate life form that merely disguised itself as human in order to lure its prey. Carpenter had a different idea. "He didn't want any prosthetics on the vampires," said Nicotero. "John thought it more frightening, and more of a classic horror feel, if the vampires were more human looking. He wanted to stay with the classic methods that are really how movies are made."

While films like the recent *SPAWN* relied heavily on computer-generated effects to create their otherworldly characters, Carpenter, again, had a different vision. "As far as I understand, there are no digital effects in the film," said Nicotero. "John wanted to stay away from them. He wanted to make the vampires as seemingly real as anything can be in a film. If you look at John's best

movies they are terrifying not because of effects, but because of the direction. John has always been a very actor-driven director. He tries to make sure that the effects don't overpower the drama of what's happening with the actors."

Nicotero added, "I saw the movie in December, and every ounce of blood, sweat and tears everyone put into that film is on the screen. I think this is a film where everything—script, cast, effects and direction—all comes together. And you just don't see that all that often anymore." □

DISTURBI

The latest stab at teen horror

By Frank Garcia

According to screenwriter and co-producer Scott Rosenberg, *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* is *THE STEPFORD WIVES* meets *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*—with a twist. The MGM film hopes to capitalize on the current popularity of teen horror flicks. Headlining is 24-year-old James Marsden, as Steve Clark, a newcomer to Cradle Bay who befriends locals Gavin Strick (Nick Stahl) and Rachel Wagner (Katie Holmes) and soon realizes that the town's become a laboratory for a modern-day Frankenstein, Dr. Caldicott (Bruce Greenwood). Lending their talent in supporting performances are veteran actors Steve Railsback (*THE STUNT MAN*) as the sheriff and William (DIE HARD II) Sadler as a seemingly retarded high school janitor. Director David Nutter makes his feature debut after helming numerous *X-FILES* episodes.

"*DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* is about a kid who moves to a new town and soon comes to realize that all the bad kids in high school are being turned into good kids," Rosenberg revealed. "He's a good, regular kid, but as he starts to investigate, he gets into trouble and becomes open to the procedure himself."

Rosenberg explained, "They're going in

and messing with these kids' brains to turn them into 'A' grade students and all-star athletes. It's not brainwashing; it's more SF than that—it's literally opening up the brain and removing pieces and planting other pieces. But the problem is that every now and then the kids are given up to these random acts of unbelievable homicidal violence. That's sort of the glitch they haven't figured out. The movie opens with the star quarterback in school necking with a girl on the bluff. And the police come to basically say you can't be on the bluff because it's past curfew. And this kid, this 'A' student quarterback goes crazy, strangles the girl, shoots the cop and completely melts down. And two seconds later he's back to normal. We're trying to go for that notion I think is really scary: 'Would you, if you could be guaranteed that your kids would go to Harvard, be willing to give up part of their humanity...?'"

"I thought it was a cool premise!" exclaimed Marsden. "This film reminded me of a horror film of a more creepy, paranoid kind rather than a scary *SCREAM* kind of movie. This one has more depth to it. The horror movie is back in style, and people just go to be scared. The studios are paying big money to make a B-movie, but they do it very well and they make money."

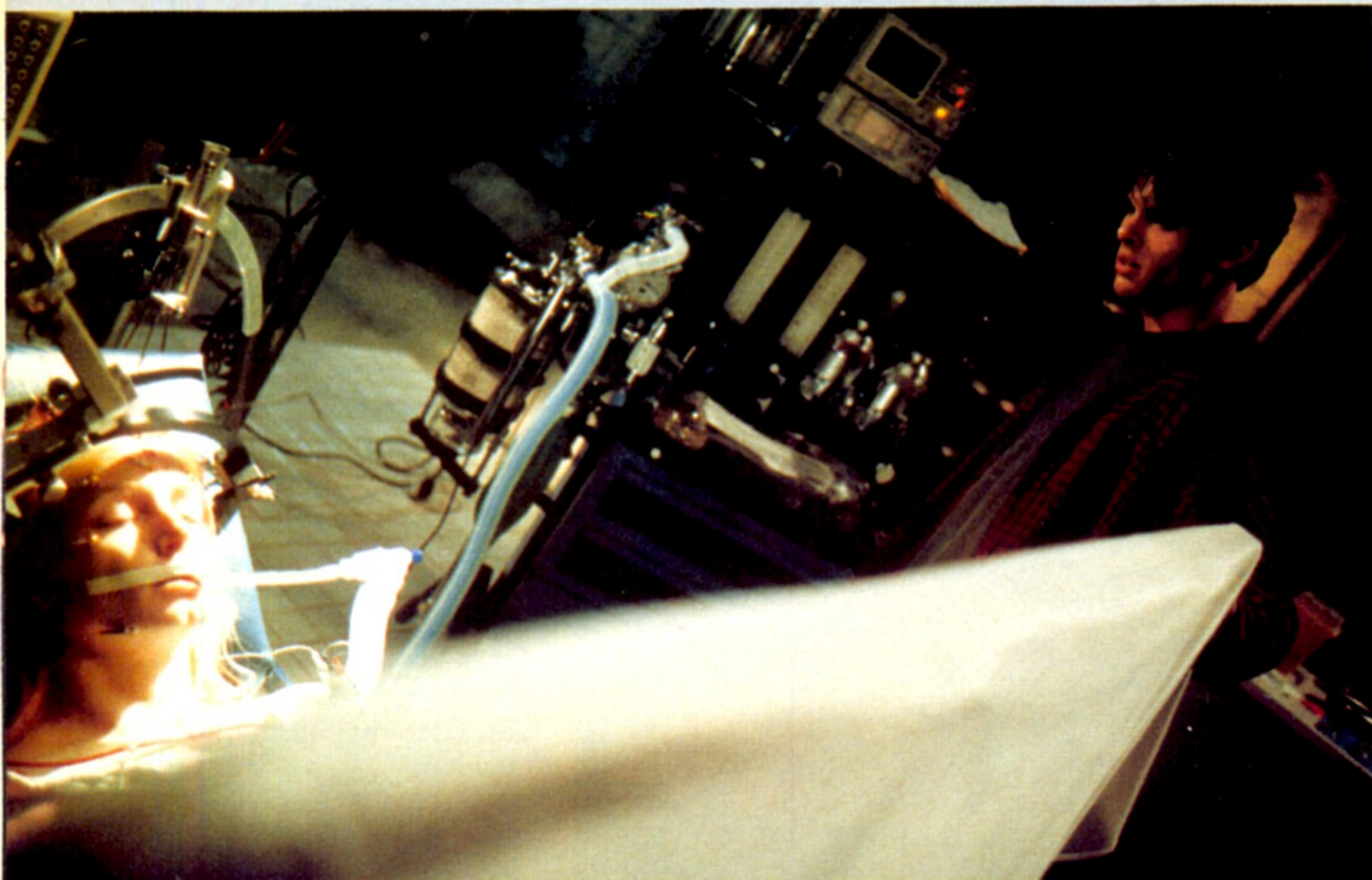
"I thought it was very interesting. It's not a slasher film; it's a little far-fetched but we're making it very believable and interesting," noted 18-year-old Katie Holmes. "This whole string of horror movies is being written now as a result of *SCREAM* and *SCREAM 2*. I've been reading a lot of horror scripts, and I really like the stuff."

To provide the film with the right tone of creepiness and moody atmosphere, producers Jon Shestack and Armyan Bernstein turned to veteran television director, David Nutter, whose work also includes *SPACE ABOVE AND BEYOND* and *MILLENNIUM*. To help him complete the film on a tight budget and schedule, Nutter conscripted a number of old pals from *THE X-FILES*, including: John Bartley, the director of photography; Toby Lindala the special effects makeup artist; and, of course, Mark Snow, the composer.

"This is a film that's more than just fright wigs," said Nutter. "It has a lot to say. Not only is it a scary horror movie, but it's



Top: Lorna (Crystal Cass) decides to check out of Belknap Psychiatric Facility. Middle: the facility hardly seems therapeutic. Bottom: Steve (James Marsden) finds Lorna in the cranial operating room, where bad kids are turned into good kids.



NG BEHAVIOR

could have been called "The Stepford Kids."

also creepy. It stays with you after, and it has impact. A lot of films these days are pretty much popcorn and bubblegum. This way, I can affect people."

Nutter wanted to direct Rosenberg's script because "there aren't very many films today concerning paranoia... that's a rich bedrock. I really feel that the teenagers today are the aliens among us. We talk about movies with aliens—sometimes the teenagers are just like that. We see these kids and say to ourselves, 'What happened to that kid? Why are they the way they are?' When I read the script the bottom line was it had to be plausible. What this guy [Dr. Caldicott] does to these kids has to be possible. If it's not believable or real, there's no threat or drama! If not, you're saying, 'It's a fantasy and it doesn't count.' I think it should count. I was offered I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER while I was in the middle of doing X-FILES, and I felt, 'How can I do something that makes fun of the genre when I'm in the middle of X-FILES, which is more grounded in reality?' When I read [DISTURBING BEHAVIOR], I thought it would be something more than just making a scary movie. It's a lot smarter and could affect people who watch it and see themselves in it."

Although DISTURBING is essentially a paranoid thriller, a few scenes required horror movie special effects makeup, so Nutter beckoned to Toby Lindala, whose team contributed to THE X-FILES and MILLENNIUM. From Lindala, Nutter needed a full-bodied corpse without a head or hands. Lindala also created a facial and head mask piece of a woman with a surgically exposed cranial section of her brain. Elsewhere, the script had a couple of kids committing suicide with a gun and it fell to Lindala and his team to convincingly show them blasting their heads off.

"We're contributing to key story points," said Lindala, "but they're not big, over-the-top visual makeup effects. That's really exciting. The big challenge in doing a project like this is to pull it off believably. I was trained by Dick Smith [THE EXORCIST],



Director of photography John Bartley (center left), director David Nutter (center), and actor James Marsden (right) on location for DISTURBING BEHAVIOR.

and I love that school of thought—recreating reality. Hopefully, a lot of the stuff we've done in the picture, people won't think are makeup effects. The effects will help tell the story, and people will think of what it represents, as opposed to 'Wow! What a cool makeup effect!'"

According to Rosenberg, the genesis of the films' core ideas came from producer Jon Shestack. "A few years ago Jon had gotten married to a woman who already had a child. 'I'm going to have a step-kid!' [he thought] and that evolved into thinking 'Stepford kid.' That was basically the germ of the idea and it went from there. As a teenager, you're just so paranoid. Going through adolescence is when you're pretty sure everyone is out to get you. It really lent itself to that kind of genre: Are you with me or against me? Who's bad or good? It's a good melding of the teen genre with paranoid science fiction."

Rosenberg's story offer a morally questionable solution, provided by the character of Dr. Caldicott, to a current social problem played out in today's headlines. "If you look at what's going on in the past couple of years—kids going with guns into high schools and shooting people, killing the pizza man just because they wanted to see what it felt like—it's crazy!" exclaimed Rosenberg. "Sixteen-year-old women giving birth to babies and killing them. Obviously, there's something wrong. I think you'll find a lot of people—parents—who

would say 'God, if they could just put a chip in their head and make them good! Yeah! Go for it!' Once these kids are turned and get straight A's, win the sports games and seem polite, at the same time they're unbelievably cold and lacking in any kind of sensitivity. They're almost like Nazi youth."

"I think this film will raise a lot of questions about parental control and societal standards and how they're affecting teens," said Holmes. "Maybe it will help and motivate teens to establish their own ideas, encourage them not to do drugs but also not to have them feel too much pressure. I think

there's a lot of repression that goes on in teen years."

"Honestly, I'm very down on this whole idea of just medicating the kids so they'll be fine," grumbled Rosenberg. "It really freaks me out. Childhood is a land mine, especially adolescence. But you get through it with the help of your family. If you come from a good, nurturing family then you will persevere."

Summing up, Scott Rosenberg quips, "I'd love it if there was an episode of OPRAH when this movie comes out, and people sat and discussed, 'How far are we from DISTURBING BEHAVIOR being a reality?'" □

Makeup effects artist Toby Lindala prepares the prosthetic head of Lorna for the cranial operation.



By Dan Persons

You've got the sacred and the profane, the pious and the scientific, the cerebral and the visceral. And then you've got π (pronounced *Pi*), Darren Aronofsky's Sundance award-winning debut feature in which all the goods get gathered into one dark, delirious package. Starting out as one scientist's quest to comprehend the great intangibles, ending with his supplication in the face of the Almighty, this low-budget (\$60,000), engagingly retro (shot in black-and-white) feature represents a face of science fiction that Hollywood execs couldn't even begin to imagine.

The film takes its title from the sixteenth letter of the Greek alphabet, used in mathematics to designate the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter: 3.14159265...etc. The decimal fraction extends into infinity, with no known pattern emerging—at least none that's been discovered so far. But Max Cohen (Sean Gullette)—brilliant mathematician, Hawkings-calibre author, and paranoid recluse—believes patterns can be discovered everywhere, and he intends to prove his point in regard to π . Max has more practical pursuits as well: Having proclaimed his intention to master the patterns that drive the stock market, he finds himself courted by an ominously beguiling stock broker intent on using the technique for her own gain. Having built the super-computer that will perform the task, he finds himself pursued by the aggressively avuncular scholars of the Kabbalah who suspect that the machine will also allow them to uncover the numeric code of the Bible, and eventually the true name of God. Believing that there is a calculable pattern to every phenomenon in the universe, he still cannot explain the seemingly random fits that plague him with increasing frequency. Maybe all this grief has something to do with his own, passive-arrogant personality. Maybe it's something to do with the mammoth number that

Searching for the mathematical secrets of the universe.



Using his computer to unravel patterns in the infinite number π (*Pi*), Max Cohen (Sean Gullette) stumbles upon a mysterious phenomenon of mystical import.

the short-circuiting super-computer spits out as it expires. Then again, maybe it's just the logical outcome of Rudy Giuliani's anti-jaywalking campaign.

In a world where science fiction heroes more frequently are portrayed by actors with such names as Sly or Ahhhhh-nuld, director Aronofsky is quite pleased with placing a

mathematician front-and-center of his vivid, cerebral horror tale. "You definitely get the mad scientist a lot," he said, "but the mathematician I thought was sort of a nice, '90s style version of the mad scientist. I'm not sure why we haven't seen that yet, but I think he could be a heroic figure for the future of cinema."

Aronofsky may wind up

something of a hero himself for young filmmakers who have been struggling to prove that you don't need the gross national product of Ethiopia and the graphics-generating power of all the computers on the west coast to make engaging science fiction. Recruiting individual investors to pony up \$100 with a promise of a \$150 return should the film find a distributor (now that Live Entertainment has picked up the rights, the contributors have been paid), Aronofsky wound up with what he calls a "socialistic structured" production in which everyone, from the P.A. on up, stood to profit. "The hardest thing," admitted Aronofsky, "was to accomplish a science fiction film on a low-budget scale of economy. People normally perceive science fiction as effects-laden and high production value. We wanted that high production value, but we didn't have the money to spend, so we basically tried to take our physical limitations and turn them to our advantage. By recognizing what we *couldn't* do, we accepted that and just made what we *could* do as good as we could. Everyone was sort of laughing at me for the concept of 'we're trying to do a science fiction film with no money.' But if you stop exploring outer space and explosions, which science fiction has sort of been captivated with for the last twenty years, and you start exploring inner space—in the tradition of Philip K. Dick and Rod Serling—you can do things with less money."

Of course, it does take ingenuity. With the exception of Max's combined living-workspace—built as a set in a Brooklyn lighting warehouse owned by the father of one of π 's co-producers—the bulk of the film was shot in genuine, grungy New York locations. Max's super-computer, meanwhile, was nothing more than an assemblage of scavenged Apple components, enlivened by decidedly low-tech graphics. "That was a lesson learned, I guess, from Terry Gilliam," said Aronofsky. "You always



Lenny (Ben Shenkman, r), a Kabalistic scholar searching for numerical patterns in the Torah, tells Max (Gullette) than his mathematical research is, even if only inadvertently, proceeding along similar lines.

use old technology and set it in the future to make it more timeless. When you watch any of the old sci-fi films, my big problem with them is that they date because they try to project what the future will look like. It's really hard to do that, because you're always wrong. So what we tried to do was take technology that we all know, but say it has special abilities, because of its size and its wiring."

More rarefied technology, at least for these days, was used behind the camera. Said Aronofsky, "The whole concept of [shooting in] black-and-white was the first idea I had. People have asked me if I had more money would π be the same film? Definitely, π is a film about its limitations and making those limitations as strong as possible. I think that shooting in black-and-white, especially the high-contrast film stock that we chose, was a very early stylization choice that we wanted to do. I've always wanted to shoot a feature in black-and-white. I'm a huge TWILIGHT ZONE fan, and I just felt black-and-white helped us to make the time and the whole period of the piece very questionable."

Aronofsky faced "tremendous problems" shooting black-and-white: "No labs handle it. We actually shot in a film stock that no-one's ever used for a feature film, called black-and-white reversal. A lot of students use it for films, and we chose it because it's a really contrasty, beautiful film stock; it looks like a photograph. We didn't want to make a black-and-white film; we wanted to make a black or white film. Like *Sin City* by Frank Miller—we wanted to make a movie that looked like a graphic novel. The only lab that did it in the country on a professional level was a place

called Bono in Virginia. What that meant was we weren't getting dailies; we were only able to see the film once a week. It was a big problem, but it was worth it. It was a big gamble: you're shooting and you don't know what you're shooting and ten days later you're seeing stuff like you shot it three years ago, and you're going, 'Oh, my God...'"

Appeals to the deity may not have helped Aronofsky if he had misstepped in his portrayal of the Hasids who become the most avid pursuers of the beleaguered Max. In distinct contrast to current media portrayals, these scholars of the Kabbalah are not passive, hand-wringing victims. They're tough, determined zealots who, even in their more amicable mode, still present an aura of aggressiveness. Aronofsky, himself Jewish, had no reluctance in filtering his Brooklyn encounters with proselytizing Lubavitchers into the film: "Have you ever been approached by someone like that? I think that any religion has characters like that. We've been having people respond to the film in Utah, in Salt Lake City, which doesn't exactly have a lot of Ha-

Writer-director Darren Aronofsky makes an impressive, ambitious debut with π .



“The mathematician, I thought, was a nice '90s style version of the mad scientist. I think he could be a heroic figure for the future of cinema.”

—Director Darren Aronofsky—

sidim. Everywhere where we've played, people have responded, and I don't think they've all run into that character as a Hasid, but they've run into them in different religions. Anyone who proselytizes for his religion sort of puts on that show."

And if single-minded Hasidim and gangster-like stockbrokers seem rather broad portrayals, according to Aronofsky, it's not by accident: "I make very, very big characters, so that they're almost cartoonish. I think it may come from the fact that I grew up on cartoons, and so I see people as representing one train of thought, one sort of idea or concept. Sometimes it's pushed so far in one direction that it comes off as a statement about those types of people. Sometimes it's perceived as funny. I think when audiences laugh, I know I meant a joke there, but it's more a subtle joke. It's not laughing at a joke; it's more like laughing at recognition, like, *I've seen that in life, and isn't it funny being portrayed in film this way?* I think that's the laugh I'm getting."

Laughs Aronofsky is definitely getting, as well as awards and more than a little attention from some heavy weight players. At the time of our interview, the director was still reeling over a recent phone call from Ridley Scott, regarding a possible, non-genre film project. "He called me on the phone. I was like, 'Mr. Scott?! I used to write book reports about BLADE RUNNER!' I mean, BLADE RUNNER and ALIEN are two of the greatest sci-fi films ever made. I had him on the phone, with the British accent and everything, telling me he really liked the film. I was like, 'Uhhhhhhh, okay.' So this is a project he developed for himself to direct, but he doesn't want to direct anymore; he's looking for a director. They actually screened π for him, and he called me from the screening room to tell me he wants to talk to me about the project. The subject matter is really cool, but we'll see if it's the right situation. My goals were to do a science fiction film next with a bigger budget and a few more toys, but this might be an interesting project to do. We'll see what happens." □

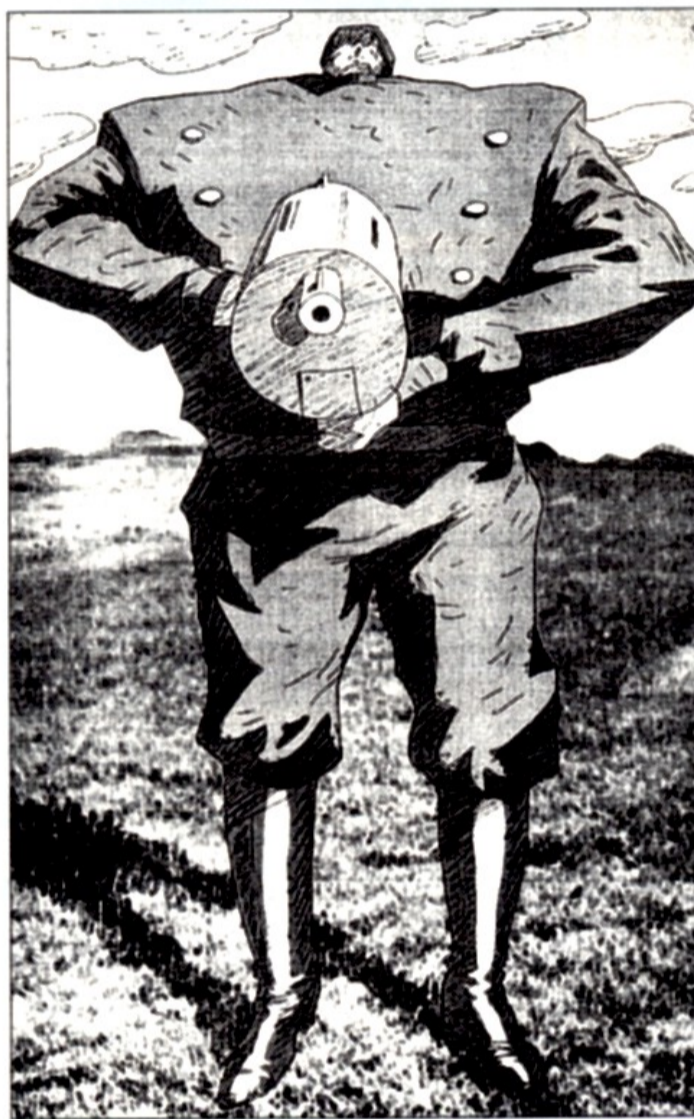
I MARRIED A STRANGE

“Tex Avery on acid”—ultra-sexy, ultra-violent

By Dan Persons

Can two yuppies find love, happiness, and material prosperity in a world gone mad? How about when one of them has the power to alter reality at whim? Those are the daunting questions asked by *I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON*, cartoonist Bill Plympton's new, animated feature, which will see a limited release by Lion's Gate Films starting this summer. A self-proclaimed exercise in “ultra-sexy, ultra-violent, ultra-funny” humor, the film has already succeeded in opening eyes at this year's Sundance festival (*Variety*'s Joe Leydon called it, “Tex Avery on acid”), and is now set to confound sensibilities at art-houses across the U.S.

“I do feel an obligation to explore new styles of humor, to break stereotypes in terms of what's funny,” said Plympton about his creation, which at one point has a riding-mower-obsessed suburbanite attacked by his own, vengeance-crazed lawn. “That's why this film really does push the envelope in terms of good taste and violence and sex. I'm always exploring new



Bill Plympton, best known for short subjects such as *SEX AND VIOLENCE*, has completed his second feature film, *I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON*.

I love about making animated films.”

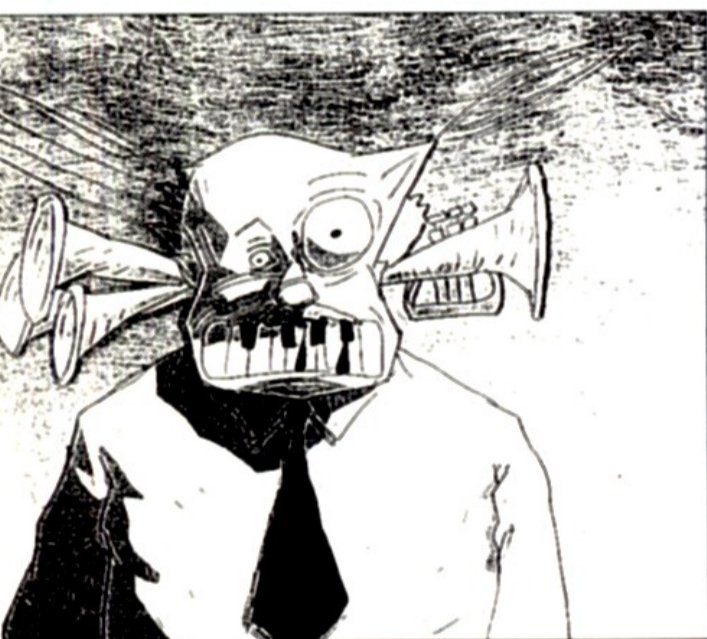
There'll be a lot for anarchists to love in *I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON*, the tale of two newlyweds, Kerry and Grant (voiced by Charis Michelsen and Tom Larson, respectively), whose lives are overturned when Grant is zapped by microwaves generated by a misdirected satellite dish (collisions with copulating air-fowl will do that, yup). Graced with the power to transform his slightest thought into reality, Grant discovers both upsides and downsides to his abilities. While sex becomes an intensely rapturous, if somewhat surreal, experience—even the wall outlets get caught up in the good vibes—a subsequent attempt to take Grant's talents public on a late-night talk show garners the unwanted attention of the UPN-like Smile Corp. Network. With evil CEO Larson Giles (Richard Spore) bent on world domination via Grant's magical abilities and the vast, Smile Corp. paramilitary corps in hot pursuit, it's all Grant can do to save his own skin and

recapture the love of his baffled spouse.

As with his previous animated efforts (including the feature-length *THE TUNE* and such famous shorts as *YOUR FACE* and *25 WAYS TO QUIT SMOKING*), Plympton served as writer (with P.C. Vey), director, and sole animator and in-between-er on *STRANGE PERSON*. This time, however, there were some significant advances in the production process, starting with the development phase. Said Plympton, “I shot the film in live-action, first. What I did, I put some ads in the local theater magazine, *Backstage*, and I auditioned a lot of people for the characters. There are five or six main characters, and I cast them out of a casting call of about a hundred people for each role. I shot them on video tape for source material.

“What happened, oddly enough, was the voices of these people that I cast were very wonderful and actually fit the characters very well. I think when I cast them, subconsciously, I was also listening to their voices. Once I had drawn the film and animated it and shot it, then I brought these actors back in and had them do voice overdubs over their moving mouths.... The interesting part of the film is near the end: when I show the credits, I have the animated picture of the character and the photograph of the actor who played the character. The audience just busts out laughing because they didn't realize that these characters were actually real people.”

The post-dubbing of voices—a process in common use in Japanese animation but rarely done in the U.S.—wasn't the only technical break for Plympton: “People know me for the colored pencil look I usually have. [*STRANGE PERSON*] is much more traditional, in that it's painted cels. The reason why I did that was, quite frankly, it's really time-consuming and laborious to go in and color-pencil each drawing with shading and detail in the face and the eyes. What I did on this one was I hired about five or six cel-painters—art students, basically. I would do the drawing, which would be Xeroxed on an acetate cel, and then they would paint the cels. It still has that same kind of Plympton look, but now it's a little more commercial—more painted cels—and so it's easier for me to do.”



ways to make people laugh. The anarchy found in the Marx Brothers really influenced me a lot. That's why there's a quote at the beginning of [*STRANGE PERSON*] from Pablo Picasso: ‘Good taste is death to creativity.’ This film is full of bad taste and full of anarchy and full of craziness. That's where the best laughs are, the best humor is—when everything makes no sense and you totally abandon rationality. That's what

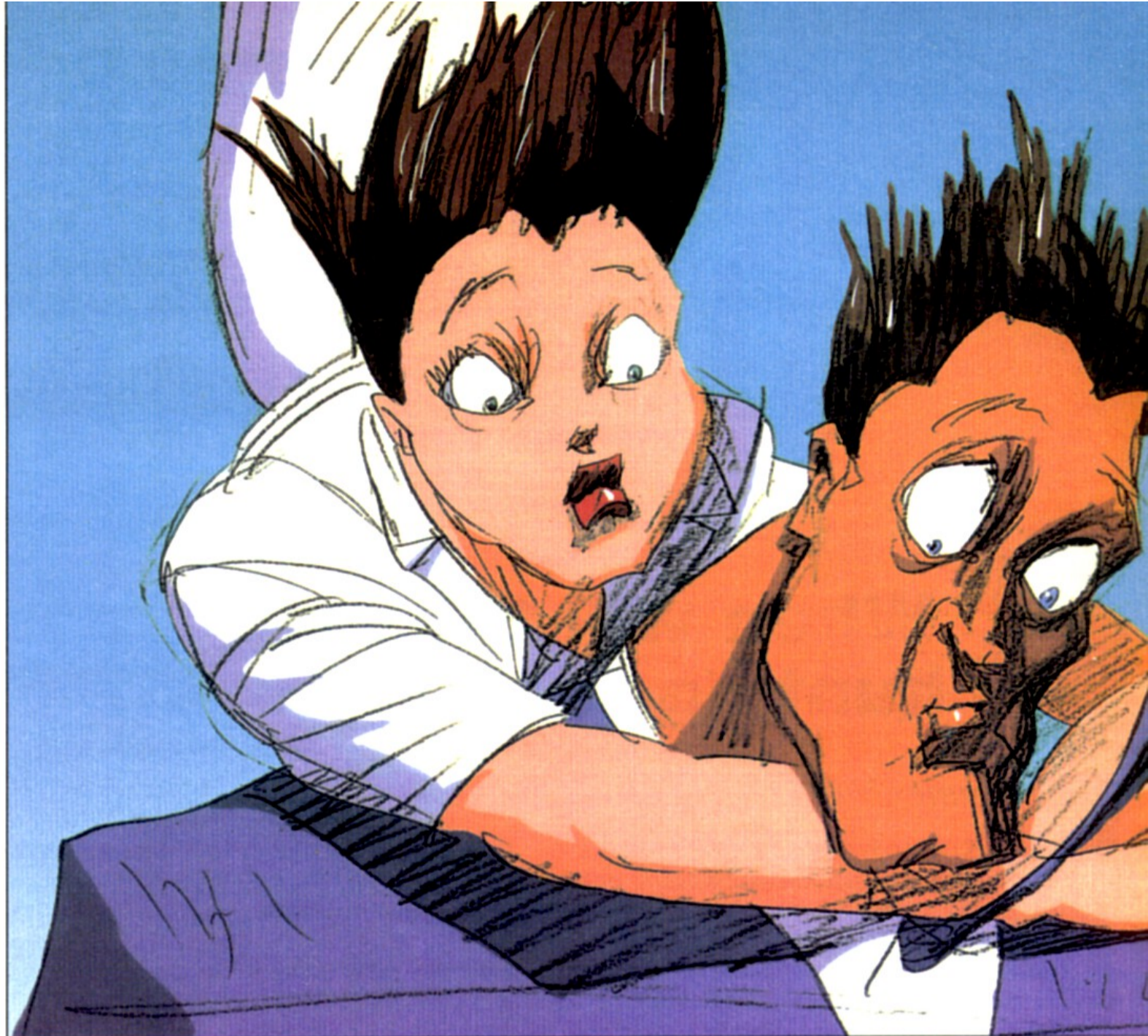
PERSON

and ultra-funny.

Even though Plympton has relinquished the painting process to other hands, he is quick to point out that the distinctive look of *STRANGE PERSON* stems from only one source: "I did all the drawings: 30,000 drawings, all the in-betweens—every drawing that you see in the film is done by me. It's interesting, because the best part, obviously, is doing the drawings. There were several times when I would be really cooking on it, and I wouldn't get any phone calls, any distractions, and I could do a minute a day. That's pretty amazing, when you think that a good animator at Disney will do maybe a half-second a day. I started thinking, *Jeez, if I could work without interruption, I could do a feature film in three months*, which is very bizarre. I just get into this Zen thing where I sit at my drawing board and maybe take time to eat and go to the bathroom, and basically I can get so much work done, it's fantastic. In fact, at one point Signe [Baumane], who paints the cels—she's very fast, too—and I were going so fast that the cameraman couldn't keep up with us. We were producing the stuff too fast for him to shoot it."

Supplementing *STRANGE PERSON*'s story will be five new songs from long-time Plympton collaborator, Maureen McElheron. "It wasn't as intense as with *THE TUNE* [for which McElheron contributed 12 songs], but I enjoyed working with her. I basically come up with the concepts for the songs; I know visually what's going on, so I show Maureen the storyboards and tell her

Very much a hands-on artist, Plympton himself drew each of the 30,000 drawings needed to animate *I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON*.



A newlywed couple's life is thrown into disorder when the husband develops the ability to alter reality.

what kind of words I want and the style of music that I want, whether it's a tango or a '30s jazz or a funky blues or that sort of thing. She'll write the music and play it for me on guitar, and then we'll go back and forth on the lyrics—some of the lyrics she writes, and some of them I write. And then we go into the studio—we use Hank Baum's studio, he plays almost all the instruments—and in about a day we've got the song down."

With nationwide distribution definitely locked in—about fifty prints will tour the country—Plympton hopes that his new film will fare far better than *THE TUNE*, which received lackluster treatment from its distributor. "I really got screwed over by October Films," said Plympton. "I got screwed over royally: I didn't see a dime from October Films. That was really depressing, because I spent three years on it, \$175,000 of my own money, and saw absolutely zero from October Films on it, and there's nothing I can do about it. Now I know what options are available to me: I can self-distribute; I can use other ways to distribute the film. That's a real important lesson. Another lesson I learned is that I prefer [producing] these films myself, for a number of reasons: it's faster; it gives me more freedom—I really know what I want these films to look like—and when you come around to signing these agreements [it's less trouble]. The agreement with Lion's Gate, I had to get releases from everybody who worked on the film, and that's just a big pain in the ass.

Someone's going to say, 'I don't want to sign a release,' and then I'm screwed. The more you do, the much easier the production is." Plympton added that, "Lion's Gate did give me a nice advance, which I didn't get from October Films. Not the total budget of the film, but it's enough to keep me going."

Also keeping Bill Plympton going are a rash of upcoming projects, including a couple of shorts, *THE EXCITING LIFE OF A TREE* and *SEX AND VIOLENCE 2* (the first installment of which got nationwide distribution through Manga Entertainment's *GENERAL CHAOS* animation festival), plus a feature project that the cartoonist expects to have finished in three years. He says the feature will be, "a little more character-driven and plot-driven, but still have a lot of the Plympton humor."

As far as reaching beyond the art-house market to a broader audience, Plympton claims that he needs only stick to his own vision of humor and wait for the world to come to him: "I just don't have the money to get it out there to middle America. I'm still an unknown. I consider myself a very middle-class, middle-of-the-road, populist filmmaker. That's my goal: to be the Jim Carrey of animation, the W.C. Fields of animation. I don't want to be an obscure, marginal kind of animator. I think my humor is broad-based humor—it's visual humor, it plays everywhere around the world. It's just a matter of time before I do get those major markets." □

BLADE

When will the vampire hunting season begin?

By James Van Hise

BLADE [cover story in CFQ #29:10] was originally scheduled to come out in February 1998, but a variety of circumstances convinced New Line Cinema to push the release back to a date in either the late summer or early fall. Screenwriter David Goyer, who adapted the Marvel Comic book into a starring vehicle for Wesley Snipes, explained what happened and what was changed, now that the filmmakers had the advantage of more time to work on the project.

"The original shooting had been cut back a bit," said Goyer. "Then we ended up getting the money to do it, going in for another week and doing a few more stunts and things for the final climactic battle. We did a new tag for the very end of the film. The final scene has always been up in the air, so I don't even know which one they're going

to go with yet. The climax of the film is still the same; it's just the very ending that's new. I've done three or four different little tag endings and a couple of them have been shot. They basically have to do with whether Blade continues his relationship with Karen, or not, or what happens after he wins the war. And possibly setting up the ground for a sequel. "We also added some more hi jinx to the climax. Basically we filmed what we had intended doing all along."

In describing the tone and style of the film, Goyer revealed, "Some of the fight sequences have some of the flare of the Hong Kong action films. The fighting has that bombastic, over-the-top feel. On the other hand, in terms of tone (and I know this will sound weird) I think the film that comes closest to it is T2. It's got this kind of big, epic, brooding feel to it. And like I said, I know that will sound odd but when people



Vampire hunter Blade (Wesley Snipes) corners his prey, the evil Deacon Frost (Stephen Dorff), in BLADE, delayed from release earlier this year.

see it I think they'll know what I'm talking about. It feels like a TERMINATOR movie in a weird kind of way, and it definitely has that kind of Cameronesque feel to it. It's not like a lot of the other vampire films that have come out. The only movie that is even remotely in the same vibe is NEAR DARK, but those were kind of hick vampires. And that's why I say that this is a more modern treatment in a film that it comes close to. But this has a more urban science fiction kind of feel to it than anything else. This would be as far removed from INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE as possible. There's nothing gothic about it at all. Stephen Norrington, the director, just didn't want to make it gothic. I didn't want to make it a gothic film, either. Everything is filmed in this kind of blue light. The sets are fantastic but they're more austere and it definitely doesn't feel like we're in Anne Rice territory."

Another factor delaying the film is that an important character in the movie, who figures in the climax in a major way, exists only as computer-generated images. "They're doing 400 or so CG shots," Goyer added. "Those are slowly coming in bit by bit. That's why the film was pushed back. None of the effects shots were going to be ready. There's one character who's entirely CG. This is the character called Lamagra who's the holy ghost of the vampires. He's a spiritual entity but he's liquid blood. He's kind of like the water pseudopod in THE ABYSS but he's all blood and he's in the climax of the film. So a lot of the shots have to do with him and the way the vampires die—they turn to ash and disintegrate.

The film takes advantage of Snipes' martial arts ability to create Hong Kong-style over-the-top action sequences.





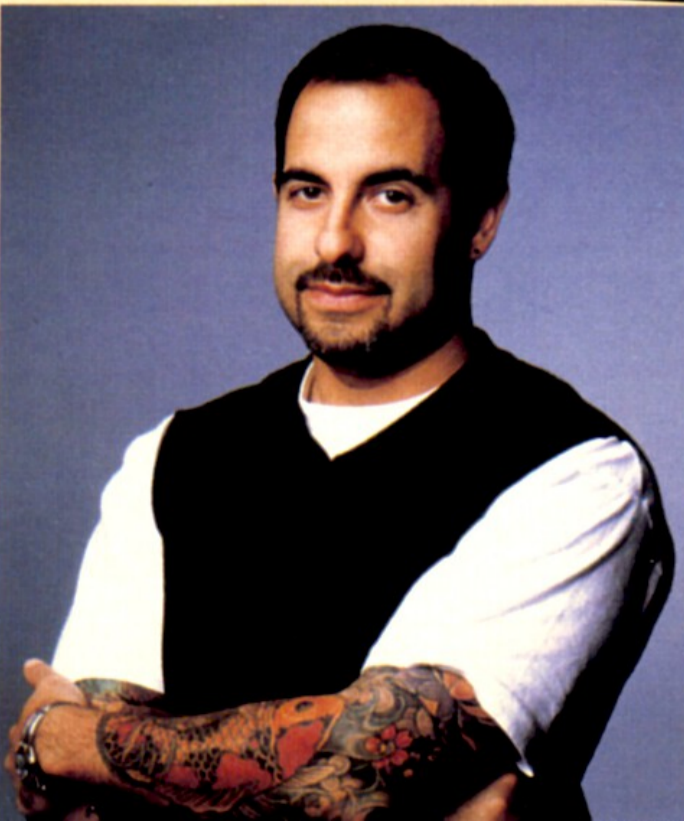
Right: Based on a Marvel comic, the film, conversely, was re-adapted back into the comic book format as a merchandising tie-in. Below: scripter David Goyer.

There's quite a few of those, and then there's a big sequence in the subway and the train itself is all CG.

"One of the neat things about it is that there's a lot of shots in it that you don't know are CG shots. In the rough cut that we have the film actually plays quite well until the climax. There's a lot of sequences before that that play well even without the effects shots, but in the climax you have a whole character who's CG, so that obviously doesn't play well. The film is supposed to be out August or September and I don't expect that all of the CG shots will be done much before July. I'm sure that it will be 'R'. I don't think it's possible to get a 'PG' rating"—he laughed—"not with all the mayhem in this film!"

Goyer also revealed his future plans, one of which involves another collaboration with Alex Proyas, the director who made *DARK CITY*. "I wrote *Quatermass*, also for Alex Proyas, which is a remake of *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT*, which hopefully is going to go forward this summer. We did a neat kind of updating of it. And I have a new script, a spec script, that's going around to the studios next week. And then there's one I wrote that is for me to direct, that hopefully will be getting going in the fall. So I'm trying to move more in that direction."

Asked whether *DARK CITY* should be interpreted literally or metaphorically, Goyer said. "You can kind of take it however you want to take it. One of the things with *DARK CITY* is also, where do these people come from? I know Alex (Proyas) has his own take on where those people come



from, but I have a different take on where they came from. He never explicitly wanted to state that, but Alex's idea is in some ways the most strange, in that all the people in that city were on a generation ship that was traveling to another galaxy and the strangers hijacked them in mid flight, which is something that you would never even think of. In my mind these people are actually dead and it's a kind of purgatory that they're in.

"But that's one of the nice things about doing metaphorical films. When the film has this dreamlike quality you don't have to explicitly explain every little detail. You can leave some gray areas." □



In VIRUS, an alien entity infests a computer and builds bio-mechanoid versions of itself that incorporate human flesh, such as the resurrected corpse of Captain Alexi, special effects by Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc.

VIIRUS

Killer cyborgs on an ocean-going research vessel—it's TERMINATOR on the high seas.

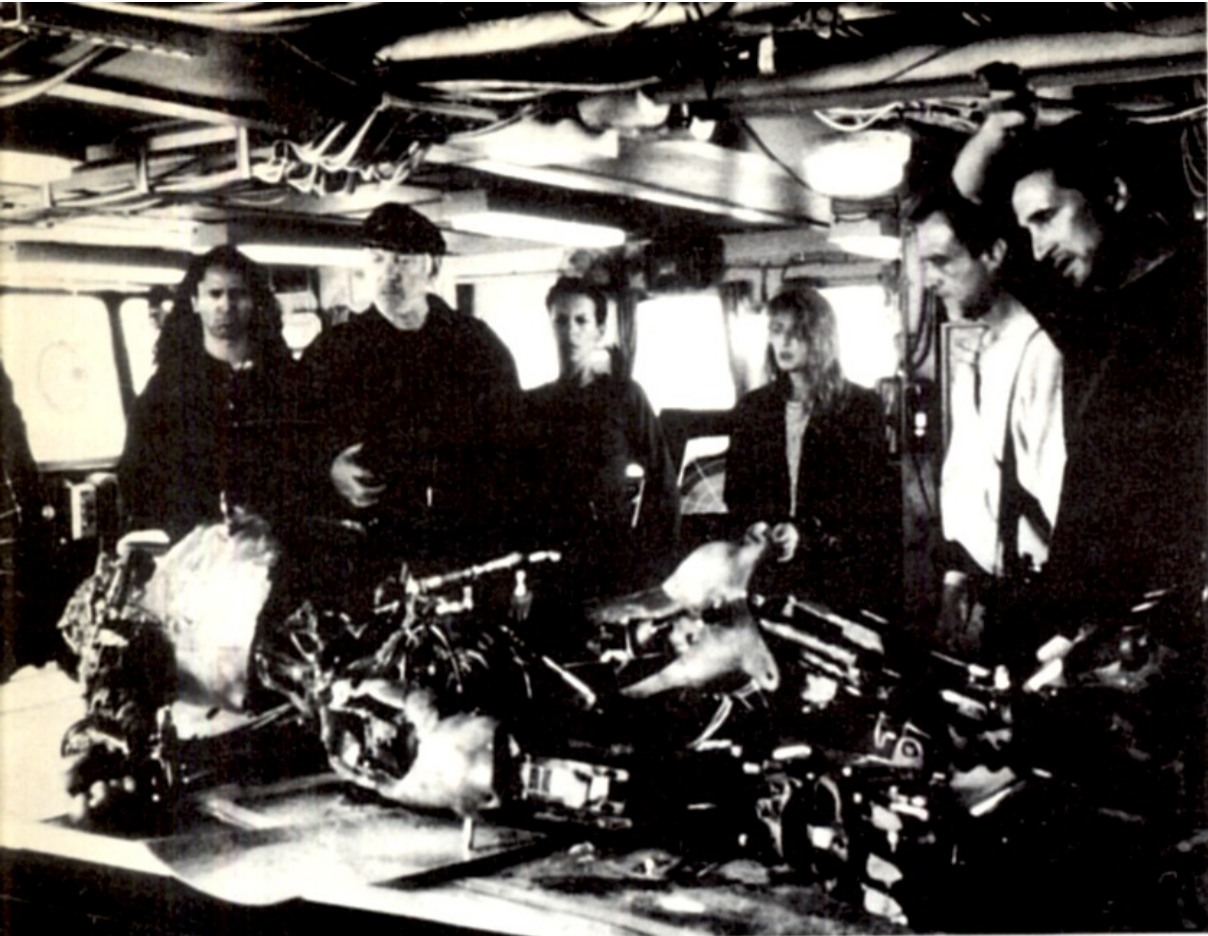
VIRUS stars Jamie Lee Curtis, William Baldwin and Donald Sutherland as a tugboat crew who take refuge from a storm in an abandoned Soviet tracking vessel and discover its crew was murdered by aliens who consider humans a virus that must be exterminated. With a script by Dennis Feldman (SPECIES), Jonathan Hensleigh (ARMAGEDDON) and Chuck Pfarrer (creator of the Dark Horse graphic novel), the film was produced by Gale Anne Hurd (ARMAGEDDON), Mike Richardson and Todd Moyer; John Bruno, visual effects supervisor on THE ABYSS and TERMINATOR 2, makes his directorial debut.

Bruno found his way into the director's chair on this effects-filled effort through his association with James Cameron. "Basically, I was doing commercials through Digital Domain, and Jim says he's going to start



In the midst of a hurricane, the crew of the tugboat *Sea Star* take refuge aboard the Russian tracking vessel that has been infested: Steve Baker (William Baldwin), Nadla (Joanna Pacula), Hiko (Cliff Curtis) and Kelly "Kit" Foster (Jamie Lee Curtis).

BY
CHUCK
WAGNER



The crew of the *Sea Star* examines the remains of a biomechanoid.

writing TITANIC. When that happened, an opportunity appeared where Arnold Schwarzenegger was available for TERMINATOR 2-3D. And Jim said, 'Why don't you start designing that, because I'm not finished writing TITANIC yet.' We started visualizing the script for this theme park attraction. Jim said, 'You know what this is supposed to look like, so pick a location and start working out the costumes. Suddenly, he says, 'Why don't you direct it? I'll come in and I'll just do Arnold.' It was a huge hit, and the Universal execs took notice.... I get this message about a project at Universal called VIRUS. They're asking, 'Would you be interested in doing this if Gale Hurd was attached as producer?' So, I read it—and I didn't like it. I got the comic—I know Mike Richardson at Dark Horse—and I read the comic and I read the script which was an advanced version expanded from Chuck Pfarrer's script, and...it was really complicated. I thought, 'This is a lot of work. I don't think I'm interested.'

"Then Jim and I went to Halifax, Nova Scotia. I was going to be the visual effects supervisor on TITANIC. I made two dives to the *Titanic*. Now I had this script and the comic book, and here I was on a Russian ship! And I looked at *Virus* and thought, 'The Chinese don't have a ship like this!'" (In the *Virus* comic, the action is set on a seemingly abandoned Chinese satellite tracking vessel. In the film, it's a Russian vessel.) "But what the comic is [based on] is

a Russian ship called the *Yuri Gagarin*. Once I was with the Russians they gave me all the lowdown on all these ships. And I thought, 'This should be a Russian ship, with a Russian crew. I know these people!' But although I was thinking about it, I thought, 'I *still* don't want to do this movie; it's too complicated.'

"Then we went through three hurricanes during TITANIC. I thought, 'Gee, maybe this VIRUS story—the entire movie—should take place during a hurricane. Because here we are on this 450-foot Russian research vessel out in the North Atlantic. Jim one day finally said, 'Well, are you going to do TITANIC or what? I gotta know!' I said, 'I don't know. The [VIRUS] story...I don't quite like it.' And Jim said, 'Well, then change it. Tell them you're going to make it yours. Put something that's you into it.'

Steve Baker (William Baldwin) hunts the alien life form that considers the human race a "virus" that must be eliminated in order to ensure its own survival.



ACTION HEROINE

"I had no delusions of Sigourney Weaver-ness; that's not my ticket," said Curtis. "What attracted me was that it is an exciting story. And the money was good."

Or don't do it.'

"So when we came back, Gale called and said, 'Are you going to do this?' And I said, 'Yeah.' So we had this meeting, and I went, 'I'll do it, but I gotta make everybody Russian and make it a Russian ship, include the Mir space station and the whole thing takes place in a hurricane and takes place in a day and a half! And that's what I'd do.' They said, 'Great! Do it! Then I had to call Jim!' Bruno said with a laugh. "He said, 'Well, you can't leave [TITANIC] until you find somebody to replace you.'"

Bruno found his replacement and was free to do VIRUS. "Gale hooked me up with the writer, Dennis Feldman," Bruno said. "We hit it off great. I had an outline of what I thought should be in the story, and he separately had almost word-for-word, line-for-line matched the concept. So we were in total sync and wrote the script very quickly."

If anything, they took the story back toward Chuck Pfarrer's original vision as shown in the comic. "We've gone back to the comic," Bruno agreed. "I

wanted to keep the title, but I didn't want to do a computer virus. Basically, the idea is an electrical lifeform that hits the mirror [on the Russian satellite tracking ship] during a transmission. It gets into the electrical system, gets into the computer and instantly figures out ones and zeros. It learns suddenly about a dimensional place: the ship and where the ship is. It learns that there are life forms all over this planet. So it's got everything. It's got maps; it's got languages and everything you could imagine that'd be in a big, computerized spy ship. It goes through biological records, files, life forms and starts to manufacture itself—using parts of the ship and crew—into a dimensional thing. And it does it in stages, and there are lots of stages. There are droids that are physically on the set. I had Steve Johnson [of XFX, Inc.] make these fantastic little droids that work. That's the other thing: it's about robotics basically! But the creature still lives in the computer. All these droids and all these machines are operated from the computer on cables. So if you cut the cables, you can cut them off. Each one of them's an ROV: remotely operated vehicle."

Although the title is the same, the sense of the title is reversed, with the virus now being...us. "The Russian crew on the boat had tried to kill it. So the creature goes through the onboard dictionary and turns up the description of something deadly that tries to kill you as a 'virus.' So it decides you have to eliminate and kill viruses. It calls everybody on the ship a virus. So that's how we ended up keeping the title."

Bruno's previous work with Cameron came in handy. "For sea shots on THE ABYSS, we took the *Bentic Explorer* out in-

VIRUS

COMIC BOOK CREATOR

Chuck Pfarrer on adapting his graphic novel to film.

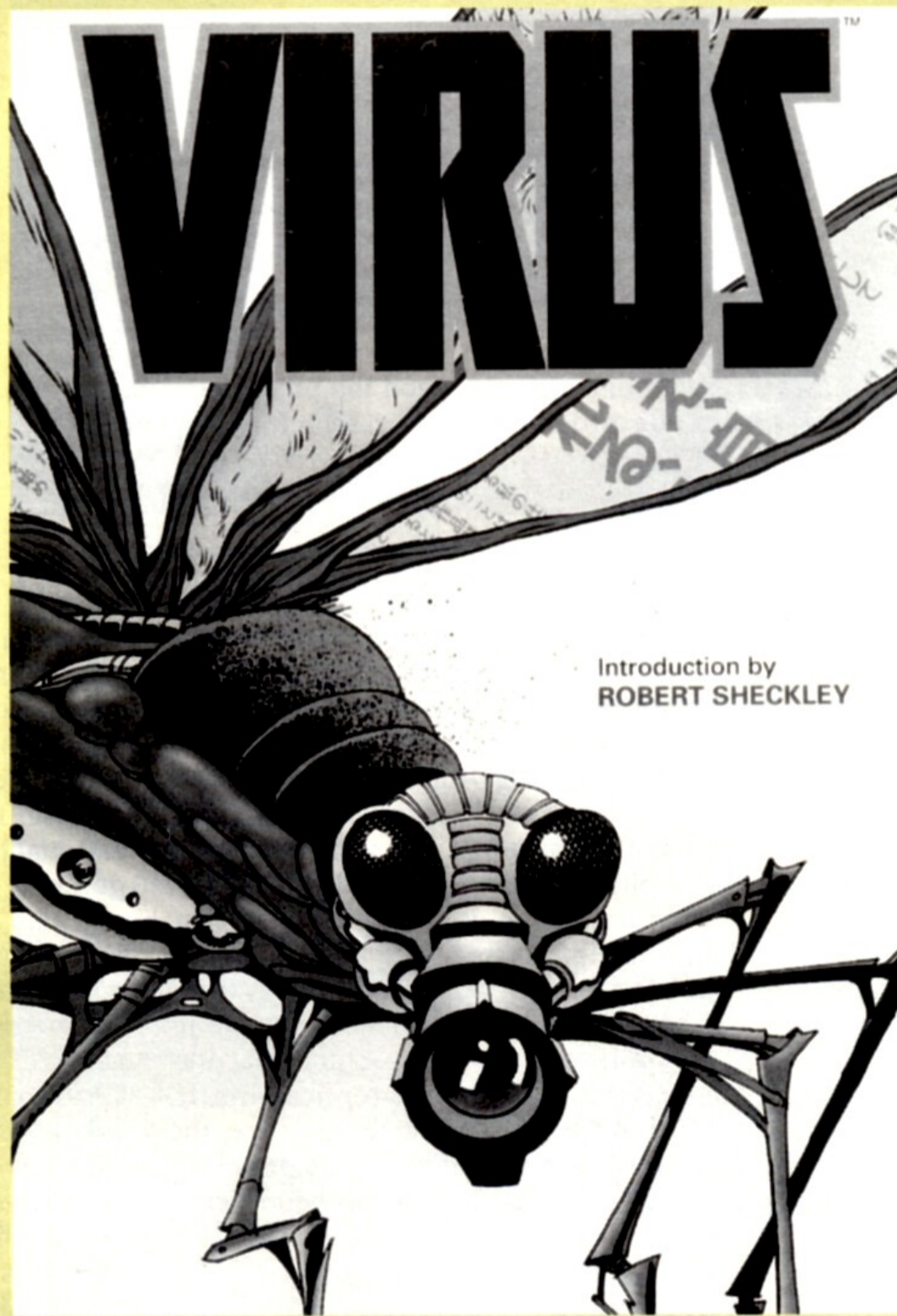
By Chuck Wagner

Chuck Pfarrer has led an unusual life for a Hollywood screenwriter—a Navy brat who at one time was sent to Stanton Military Academy in Virginia (“where John Dean went!” Pfarrer wryly noted). “It definitely puts a twist on you,” Pfarrer said with a chuckle. “You learn how to completely toe the line and keep up a complete front!”

Sounds like good preparation for Tinseltown. “It was odd how I got involved in the business. I was in graduate school for clinical psychology, and I dropped out and joined the Seal Teams. I was a military advisor in Central America and I was in the Middle East and all over the world. Anyway, I was getting out of the Navy, and I was going to go to medical school. But I had sold a screenplay while I was in the Navy.”

It’s one thing to wait tables at night while writing, but quite another to manage it while in the service. “I wrote the thing in college with a friend of mine, and it didn’t go anywhere. I get a phone call from this guy while I’m back in the States, and he says, ‘You remember that piece of junk we wrote? Well, it got nominated for a Focus Award!’ He’d gotten into the Master of Fine Arts program at New York University in screenwriting, and we both got signed by William Morris! All this while I was in [the Navy Seals]. The piece was called *THE CROOK FACTORY* and it’s about Ernest Hemingway, based on a true story. Actually, it’s never been made, but it’s been optioned a gazillion times. Someone’ll option it again.”

Pfarrer was in his twenties at the time. “So I naively decided to write another screenplay to help pay for medical school.



The film *VIRUS* is based on the graphic novel by Chuck Pfarrer (*DARKMAN*).

That became *NAVY SEALS*, the Charlie Sheen movie. It was a little bit of a Frankenstein. When they come up with an idea, it’s like ‘I’m going to be the young, wild-card character, and you’ll be the well-adjusted one.’ And I’m thinking, ‘Wow, that’s a fresh new idea!’”

Pfarrer’s sarcastic take shows a lot of Hollywood experience. “The trick to this thing is getting a film made! You gotta do every thing you can just to get it made. That’s the important thing.”

Pfarrer’s first genre credit was for co-

writing Sam Raimi’s *DARKMAN*. “Sam had an idea, and I worked on it with him,” Pfarrer recalled. “It was a writing-for-hire thing. Of course, Sam is the greatest guy in the whole world—wonderful to work with. And a wonderful guy besides, one of the most wonderful I’ve ever met in my life. We’re all very close, Sam, his partner Rob Tapert. *DARKMAN* was going to be developed for television. And I did a couple of scripts as a favor for Rob and Sam, but they weren’t picked up. That’s the only TV I’ve ever done.

The graphic novel of *Virus* was written and launched during this period. “After *Virus*, I worked on stuff like *GREEN HORNET*—they threw my draft out!” he added with a laugh. “You know the deal. That’s the way it goes. No tears out of my eyes. Then I also did *THE JACKAL* for Universal.”

Despite Pfarrer’s work in Hollywood, bringing *VIRUS* to the big screen was no easy journey. “I’m at Universal and I go to the ‘Black Tower’—that dreaded structure in Hollywood. I get the ol’ pitch machine out, and I say, ‘How about this!’ I pitch *VIRUS*. And they say, ‘How about get out of the building!’”

Even after credits on successful films? “Oh sure! You’re nobody, Bud! You’re a Teamster with a typewriter. You can’t take this personally. If you did you’d jump off a bridge! You know, in Hollywood, you go in and pitch to some producer, and they want to do it. When you leave the office, it’s their idea. And if they say, ‘What about a character who’s a giant tomato?’ and you think that’s the stupidest idea in the world, still you put it in. The whole thing is suddenly theirs.

“The writers are the only guys in the entire industry who start with blank paper.

You turn on the *Tonight Show* and there's some talking prop sitting on the couch saying, 'When I came up with this character...!' You didn't come up with anything, Bud!"

So how did Pfarrer come up with this idea? "Jim Beam and I came up with this idea!" he said with a laugh. "The idea hit me, and I took it into the studio where I have a deal. I pitch it, and they say no. So I go 'Hmm,' and return to the bungalow and say, 'I don't think that story's so bad.' "I had written a sequel to John Carpenter's *THE THING* for Dark Horse Comics. So I called Mike Richardson. He said 'Great, let's do it!' *Virus* came out as four volumes, each selling 100,000 copies for a total of 400,000 copies. I realized we had been vindicated slightly. So instead of going back to Universal, I went to Gale Ann Hurd. I said, '400,000 people bought this. Do you get it?' She got it.

"Then we went back to Universal: 'Great idea! Always loved that idea! Just think it's super! Let's do it!' Then we go into what's called 'Development Hell,' and the movie comes out three years later."

In *VIRUS*, the crew of an ocean tug caught in a storm finds refuge on an abandoned Russian research ship—which harbors something. "This is completely contemporary. It's an F.S.U.—Former Soviet Union/Russian—vessel. The Soviets had a number of satellite tracking ships [used for navigation, etc.]. Their technology was not good enough to cover the Earth as ours is. So they had to position ships in the oceans. These ships now have been converted to space research, etc. There's one in particu-

Steve Baker (Baldwin) surveys his surroundings after taking refuge aboard the Russian vessel.



COMIC BOOK CREATOR

"I pitched the idea to the studio, and they said no.... After it came out as a four-volume comic, selling 400,000 copies, we went back to Universal, who 'always loved that idea!'"



Kit (Curtis) prepares to confront the alien life form aboard the infected Russian tracking vessel, changed from a Chinese ship in Pfarrer's original.

lar that I modeled the movie one on, the *Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin*, a real ship.

"Before the movie starts, this Russian ship is out there beaming messages into space and listening. And they get a message from outer space. They're flabbergasted. They put the message into their computers to decipher it. But what they don't know is it's not a message. It's a digital life-form. It's a very interesting little thing. If it's in your Macintosh, it can't do anything. If it's in a piece of machinery that can actuate itself, it will start to build machines. Its purpose, like any virus, is to replicate itself. Before our heroes enter the picture, the Russians begin to realize that their ship is going nuts. Their lab deck has been turned into a nuclear-powered haunted house.

"And this thing has a very nasty habit. If it needs to see something, it will find a video camera and plug into it. If it can't find a video camera, it'll take a human eyeball! If it needs to pump something, like hydraulic fluid, it has to get a pump. But if it can't find a pump, it'll settle for a human heart! It'll use body parts or machine parts.

"Well, the Russians realize what's going on, and they destroy every single radio on the ship. Every uplink, everything they can. They abandon the ship and set demolition charges—in a force 5 typhoon! Simultaneously, the commercial towing vessel *Electra* is towing a cargo barge across the Pacific, and through the incompetence of her captain they foul their towline and lose

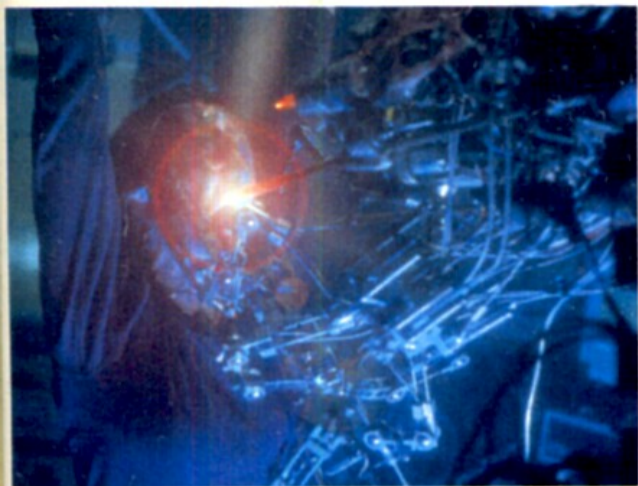
their tow. Well, the next day they're looking for their barge. Of course they can't find it, and they stumble upon this ship abandoned in international waters. So, if you put a tow line on it, it's yours.

"So these guys get on the ship and try to salvage it, and of course they wind up turning on some of the machines that are turned off and they wind up facing the virus. And the virus' agenda is to take over enough of the ship to fix the satellite uplink and beam itself into the satellite network. And from there to everything on the planet."

"The ship we filmed *VIRUS* on was the *General Vandenberg*, which was laid up in the James River in Virginia. I saw the ship when it was being laid up. That was one of the things that triggered this idea, because I thought, 'Man, that's such a cool ship! What can we do with a ship? What story can I tell about a ship like this?' And I know the Russians still used ships like this, so the story sort of reverse-engineered itself in my brain."

And a mind like Pfarrer's doesn't rest. "I'm going to be directing something next year. You know what? Now I'm at the point where I can't complain about anything. Next time I'm going to mess it up myself! It's called *ALONE*. It's about an astronaut who crash lands on Mars. We're going to simultaneously do a feature film and also an interactive movie that's going to come out on CD-ROM and DVD."

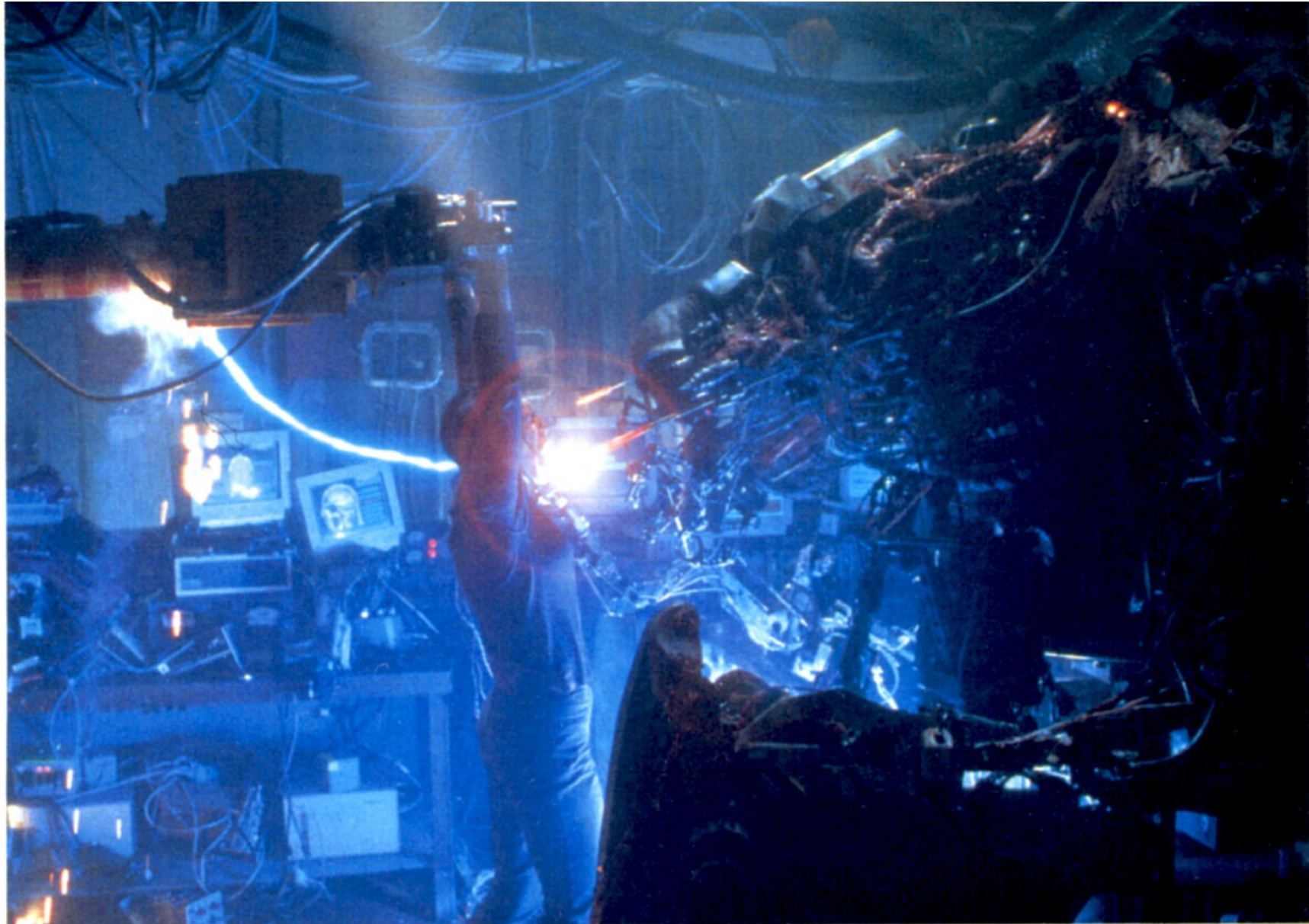
Sounds like it could star Paul Manatee and be called *ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS*. "I'm probably going to be getting Christmas cards from him!" Pfarrer chuckled, acknowledging his intentional homage. "It takes place in 2027. Remember just a couple weeks ago the *Pathfinder* quit transmitting back to earth. The reason, in our movie, is that the *Pathfinder* rolled over to a rock, picked it up, took a picture of it and carbon-dated it and it was a 3-billion-year-old human skull! You don't think that NASA would tell you that, would you? Well, in the story, they didn't tell anybody and they didn't tell that astronaut. He gets down there and becomes part of the problem. There was an accident on the manned orbiter and the one guy who wasn't briefed on this issue is now down there wandering around in the biggest mystery in the secret of mankind. So they convince the other survivors in the orbiting platform to launch a probe, ostensibly to locate this guy, but the probe's trying to kill him. I hope this will come out and be a good one." □



Kit (Curtis) is tortured by the alien life form, which wants to extract information about its human enemies.

to the North Pacific above the Columbia River. For VIRUS, I found the *Bentic Explorer*. The hulls were in a storage facility in the desert. I bought them and modified them into a ship that we'd found—the 550-foot *Hoyt S. Vandenberg*, which was a satellite tracking ship that was about to be scrapped. It was in the James River fleet. So we modified the bridge to look Russian. So all the video footage and all the stills that I'd taken on the TITANIC dive of the *Academic Keltish* were useful. And we modified the *Bentic Explorer* miniature which was at the time 45-foot into this ship, which was 50-foot."

Add to this mix a hurricane. You would think that Bruno had had enough of hurricanes while working on TITANIC. "We shot the opening of the movie by putting the ship out in the ocean in Malibu. We shot it at dawn.

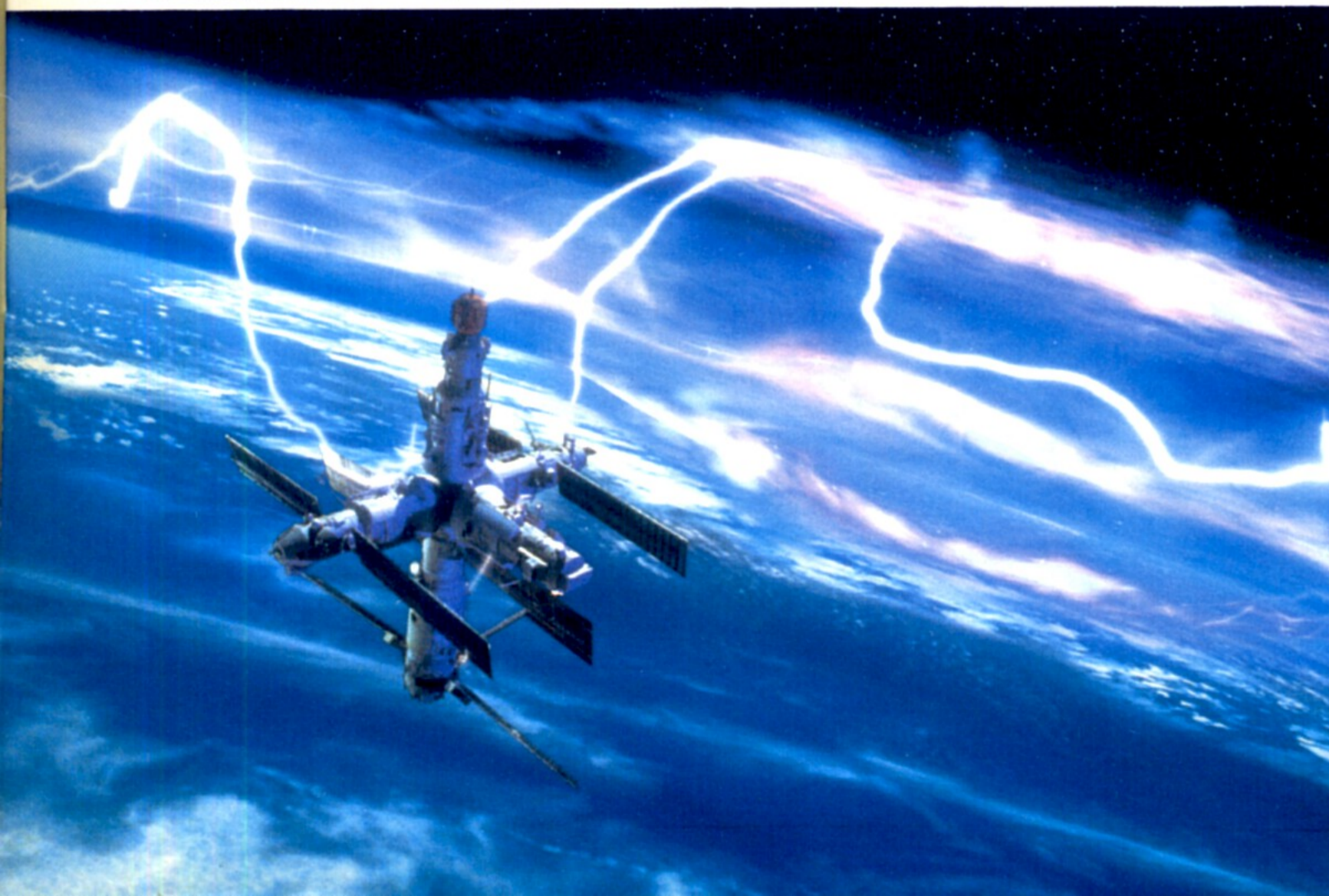


Then we had to figure out how to do this storm. So I got my old friend Gene Warren—he worked on THE ABYSS, too—and I asked him how we could generate a wave bigger than three feet. Finally he designed a tank. We put some money up to have him develop a hundred-by-hundred tank that would generate a six-to-eight-foot wave, which operates like a big toilet. It's a big 35-foot high tank that dumps the water.

"The opening minutes of the

movie is in a full-on hurricane. It's a big deal. We have 6th scale models of this big ship and this hurricane. It looks fantastic. We had to build all that to do this movie. And we needed wind machines that would blow 100 mph plus, which I got out of a place in Florida. A place that made big vertical fans that suck the air out of production facilities. You take those fans and lay them on their side and they'll blow wind horizontally at 100 mph."

The MIR space station is besieged by the alien life form, which then beams itself aboard a russian tracking vessel.



Selecting a cast to subject to this storm was a high priority for Bruno. "The biggest thing that I kept stressing through the casting process...I kept saying the best cast film I ever saw was THE WILD BUNCH—you knew who everybody was by looking at them. I wanted all these people to be real, and I wanted the actors to be the people for real. Like, this person really isn't going to act, because he *is* that person. The first person I thought of for the character of Foster, a strong female character, was Jamie Lee Curtis. I had no idea if she'd do the film, but I kept stressing her because when we did the helicopter scene in TRUE LIES where the bridge blows up and Arnold reaches down and grabs her and they fly across the gap in the bridge, Jamie saw the dailies of that with the stunt person and she begged Jim to let her do that—instead of shooting her over a green screen and dropping in the background. I never forgot that.

"When I talked to Jamie, I was thinking of scenes I wanted to see in one of these films: people in water, people in fuel oil, people in storms and a hurricane, 100 mph winds, dump tanks, being pursued by 12-foot-high 12-foot-wide robotic creatures that are for real—hydraulically operated. And she

VIRUS

ON-SET EFFECTS

Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc., brings the bio-mechanoid monsters to life.

By Chuck Wagner

You like monsters? VIRUS has got them. Lots of them, in all shapes—sometimes shifting shapes—and sizes. The company behind many of the monsters is XFX, Inc., headed by Steve Johnson, who explained:

“We took our initial ideas from the script, of course, because it’s a fairly specific hybrid of machine and man. In that respect, it’s kind of like a modern-day Frankenstein with re-animated corpses, but they’re re-animated with mechanical parts, instead of being brought back to life with electricity and magic. We did reams of designs. We designed and designed and designed. And the interesting aspect of the design process is that we had to begin with the droids, which were small ones. We made about 12 small robots out of parts that might be found on a research

vessel. In their sum total, they looked like something that existed in the real world: a crab droid; a spider droid—that kind of thing. They were emulating life forms, but doing it with existing mechanical parts. The largest ones were maybe two-and-a-half feet and they ranged down to 12 inches. We made three of them that were absolute free walkers. They walked around via remote control.”

Considering the intent of the film—to terrify—a crab droid and a spider droid don’t sound too lethal, yet.... “They’ve all got different devices,” Johnson explained. “Like one has a nail gun built into it that can fire nails. Another has a saw blade built into it. There’s a flying one that can shoot electrical impulses. They all have their own weapons.”

Johnson continued, “After that, the droids get together and decide that’s not the optimum

life form for this planet. They see humans walking around and decide, ‘Hey! I want to make a human!’ So they get together, kill the people on the ship, and then use the parts of a human that they find workable and machine the rest of the parts.”

This is the fate of the original Russian crew on the desolate tracking ship which forms the setting of the movie. It is here that an unsuspecting American tug crew will find the creations of the alien energy being.

“So they basically make super human beings: half-human, half machine,” Johnson said. “These creations are human-size, about six feet tall. We made three or four of those, the most interesting being a full hydraulic robot that was a combination pneumatic, remote control, and hydraulic, that was actually capable of walking and having every point of movement that a human being has. And it was controlled with a really interesting set of controllers. Basically, it was a telemetry system. We would strap on potentiometers and activators to a person. As the person moved, radio signals went to the robot, activating the same movements in the robot. So it was a real-time, remote-control telemetry system which worked out really, really well.”

A robot walking on two legs? “One of them did, yeah. It did have a bow mount in the back to take its weight, but it was a pretty



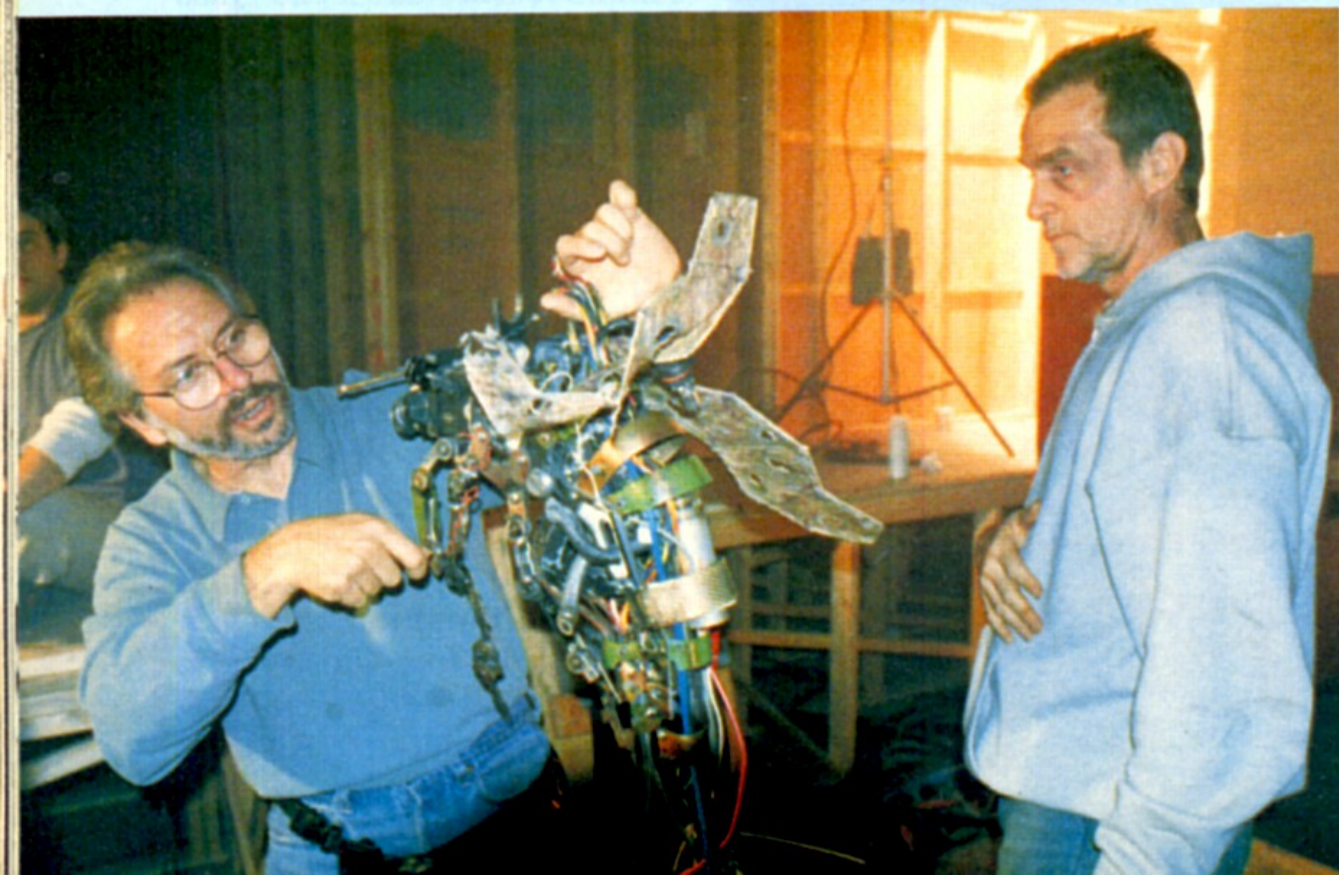
Richie (Sherman Augustus) faces off with the mysterious alien life form.

powerful piece that walked. Now MIT has a robot that can walk upright unaided, but it’s much less expensive for motion picture purposes to digitally remove the mount in the image.”

In addition to complex mechanical effects, Johnson’s company did a large number of other physical effects, including make-up. “We handled the bio-mechanoids [the human-sized robots], all the droids [about 17 robots], and all the make-up effects for the film—people getting wounded, people getting hurt. We did about 30 dead people for the machine room shop. We had quite a chunk of work. Dead Alexei was about 400 pounds and the most complex of the bio-mechanoids. We also did a fully-robotic one for the Donald Sutherland, bio-mechanoid scene. That effect was a combination of the actor in make-up for the close-ups, and the fully robotic one for the long shots, so you could see he had totally human-looking legs.”

No CGI was needed for these particular effects, which were built to operate on the set almost as if they were the real thing. “Just about any material is used, depending on what they were built for,” said Johnson. “Most of them were made of aluminum or steel and electron-

Behind the scenes, first-time director John Bruno and actor Marshall Bell (TOTAL RECALL) examine one of the bio-mechanoid creatures created by XFX, Inc.





Steve Johnson's XFX, Inc., created full-scale versions of the alien-constructed robots that could be operated and controlled in real-time, on the set.

ically operated with remote control. Some of them had rod functions for gross body movements, depending on what they were built and designed to do. A lot of them were free-walkers, and we got quite a lot of free movement out of those. The human-size ones were hydraulic, basically. The hydraulic functions were controlled electrically through the telemetry devices. Real state-of-the-art systems.

"The hydraulic ones all had hydraulic lines coming out of them," Johnson continued, "but luckily in this film the power source for all the robots—whether the giant Goliath, the Alexei, or the small droids—are all connected to the ship's mainframe computer. So they're all walking around on umbilicals anyway, which really helped us out—the umbilicals are part of the story. Even the flying bio-mechanoid still has cables coming out of it."

Yet there is an organic component to many of these creatures. This was accomplished without resorting to strap-on-beef-heart or some other such grotesque technique. "With the small droids, we did different versions: we would shoot them as completely mechanical versions, and then we'd take a couple of days down and the crew

would redress them—put crab claws, rat bones, pieces of flesh wrapped around pliers, etc. on them. Then when we shot them again, they would look even worse. But we used fake claws, fake bones, fake flesh. We were able to redress them several times so it looked like, in the film, there were many more than there were."

Though Johnson would not discuss budget specifics, he acknowledged that his share of the overall budget was "definitely into seven figures."

XFX also did a lot of effects related to the actors. "Julio Machoso played one of the bio-

Dave Snyder adds finishing cosmetic touches to BioAlexei, a hydraulic full-body puppet based on conceptual designs by Taishiro Kiya and Kerry Gammill.



EVEN MORE MODERN PROMETHEUS

"It's a fairly specific hybrid of machine and man," said Johnson. "In that respect, it's like a modern-day Frankenstein, but the corpses are reanimated with mechanical parts."

mechanoids that was more human-based than robotic. So we were able to do him as a series of mechanical prosthetics. It's as though mechanisms were built right into his flesh. And we did do a puppet version of him as well. There's a sequence where he rams through a door, and we really wanted to get him to attack the door pretty violently, and we didn't feel we could do that with the actor. So we did a puppet of him to ram through the door—and then he gets shot to pieces, so we really blew the robot up itself."

Ramming through doors? These creatures sound almost as dangerous in real life as they are in the film. "They were very dangerous on set, because they were hydraulic. If there had been any glitches in the system, and something had moved that wasn't intended to and someone was near it, they would have been hurt. We took safety precautions. We had a flashing red light when the robot was activated, and put a memo out to the crew basically telling them to treat these like there was a wild animal on set! But we didn't have any problems with our stuff."

In the movie, Marshall Bell gets his head ripped off and guts pulled out. "Something like that, yeah," Johnson allowed. "We did a severed head that's seen later in the film. For the actual death scene, we built a false body so that one of the robots could shove his arm through it and then toss it across the room about 12 feet—something a stuntman couldn't really do!"

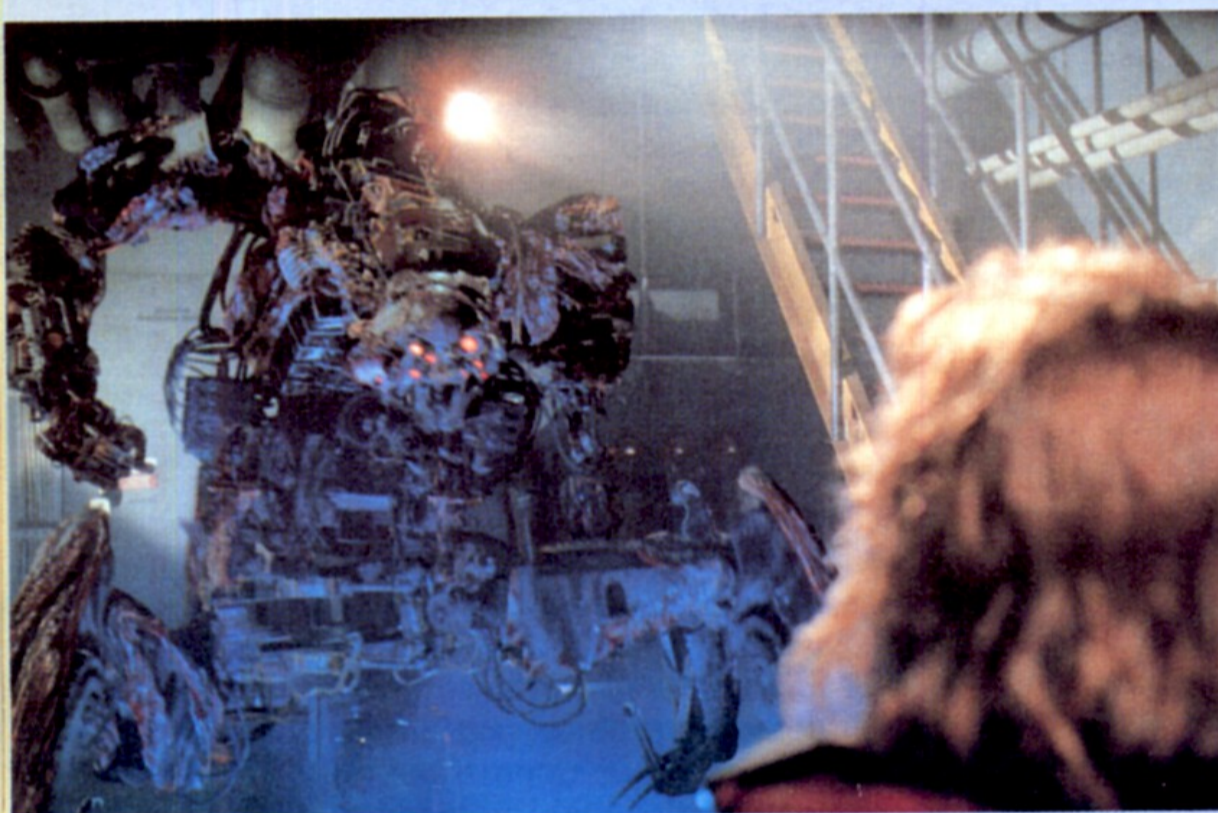
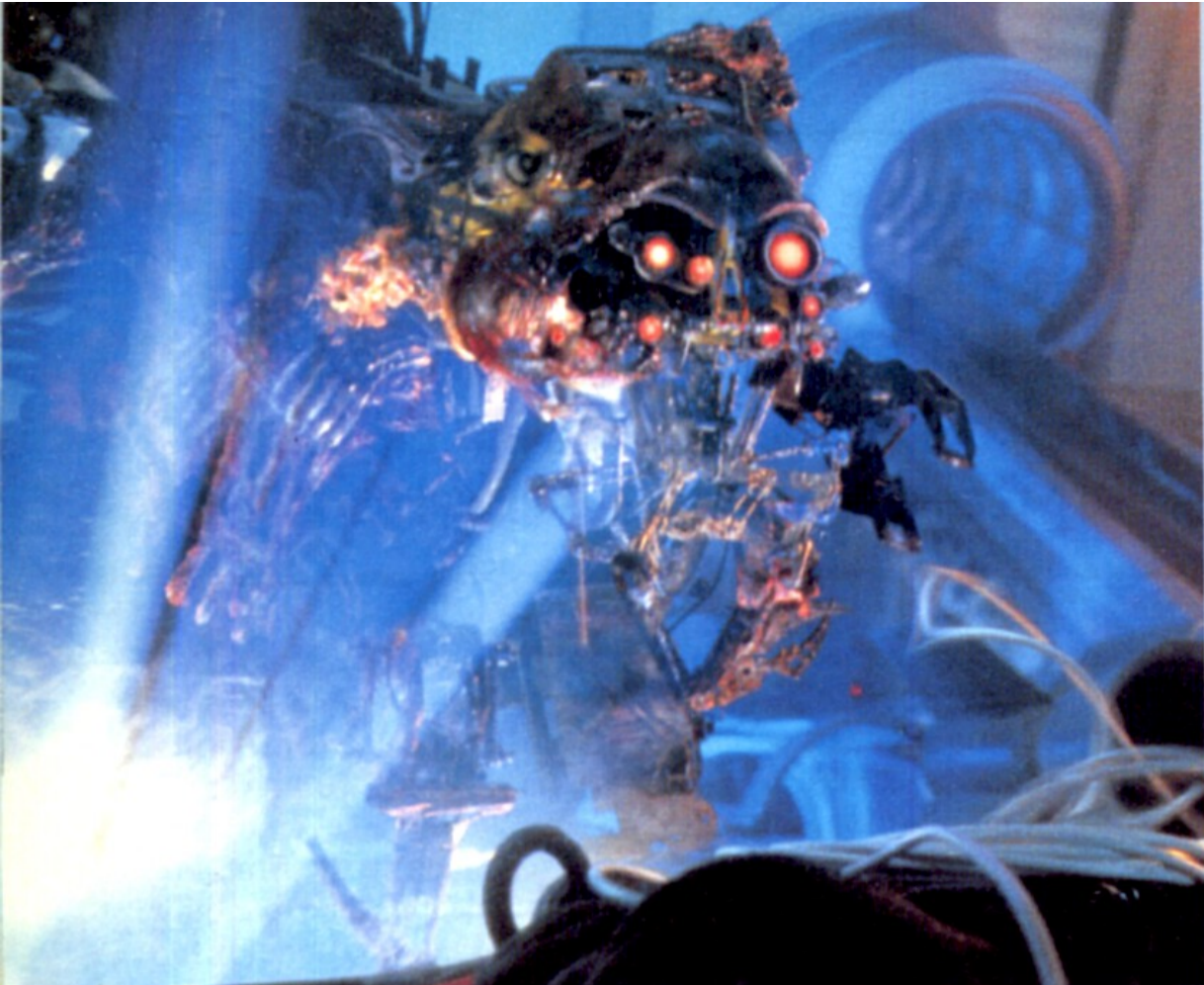
Johnson added, "One of the other really interesting things we do, is that at one point the Alexei robot is basically deactivated. Then the crew—Jamie Lee Curtis, Billy Baldwin, and the others—take it into the chart room and try to figure out what it is because they don't know yet. Then, as they're probing around in its brain, they reactivate it and it goes berserk because it's wounded. The mechanical portions rip out of the human portions. So there's a squeaking mechanical thing running around the room, until they shoot it to death. Then, in an interesting piece which we did as a series of effects, we see switchblade knives unfold out of the actor's mouth, and then they flip over backwards, grab onto his head like a spider, and start to force his head down until they split his jaw open, and then the skull pulls out of the guy's head, a saw blade comes from within the actor, saws his sternum all the way down to the navel, and then the mechanical spine lifts up and out. So you end up with kind of a snaky spine with a skull head and switchblade knives on it! Of course this was all animatronics. No live actor, even at the start."

Not exactly a film for the little tykes. Judging from Johnson's comments, we needn't worry about not having a gruesome, scary film to see this summer. □

VIRUS

PHIL TIPPETT

CGI teaches the robot invaders to walk.



Phil Tippett. Tippett Studios. Increasingly these names mean the same thing to movie-goers today that names like John Wayne and Steve McQueen used to mean: an action-packed time at the movies. CG creations like the Bugs of *STARSHIP TROOPERS* are now principal actors in a variety of films.

Although *VIRUS* chiefly uses physical effects, there's still a role for Tippett and his CGI wizards. "We did what was called the Goliath monster animation," Tippett explained. "The culmination of the alien energy, which invades the ship, makes little machines that make bigger machines that invade the humans, culminating in this horrendous mish-mash of metal and flesh. We did a number of other kinds of shots: visual effects of lightning arcs, explosions, and that kind of thing. There's also the manifestation of the *VIRUS* creature as an electrical energy source, so there were a number of other shots that we did where you don't actually see the giant robot, but he's coming."

A massive, physical Goliath was made for use on-set, but it wasn't sufficient to fulfill all the needs of the story, necessitating a computer-generated version for some shots. "The Goliath CG model was put together by Craig Hayes, the head of our art department and co-supervisor of visual effects," said Tippett. "Craig went about building Goliath by having the full scale props sent up here, and then, meticulously, measuring those props and building each part in the computer."

Measuring? The thing weighs thousands of pounds and stands ten feet high! "It's huge, and I think that there were well over 500 parts," Tippett recalled. "You use a ruler and some calipers, and you go in there and photograph the thing and make the measurements and

build the parts. It was an incredible amount of work. We started actual computer construction of the Goliath model while we were wrapping up *TROOPERS*. It took months and months and months. Our models are then built with SoftImage. It's just a matter of getting primitive objects and then pushing and pulling points. Occasionally, a particular part may be digitized—put it on the stylus and break it down. But most of the parts were actually eyeballed and measured. There were some drawings from the Goliath designers [Eric Allard Studios] that helped, but Craig is usually quite meticulous in making sure that things translate into an apparent photographic medium, the digital medium."

Tippett allowed that the CG Goliath "was definitely the most complicated model we've had to build at Tippett Studios. *VIRUS* for us was, in many ways, what is characterized in the racket as a 911 call. What happened was, as they were wrapping up post-production, they realized that the full-scale prop was not going to deliver all the action that they needed. And they covered themselves by shooting a lot of empty photographic background plates and cobbled the sequences together from that."

Just what kind of movement is needed here? Without giving away too much, how does Goliath get about? "It walks along on four kind of crab-like legs. It's sort of a cross between a tractor and a lathe or mill. Lots of moving parts, like a Swiss Army knife."

And by all accounts some of the parts are quite nasty. So, with the help of Tippett Studios, you can make the elephant, or in this case, Goliath, dance. "With all this stuff," Tippett said, referring to his shop and the amazing technology and skill involved, "you can do whatever you want, given the time and the money." **Chuck Wagner**

Phil Tippett was called in to provide last minute effects, including walking robots. Goliath, the film's biggest threat, attacks the computer room aboard the Russian vessel (top) and confronts a hapless crew member (middle). Bottom: Baker (Baldwin) is surrounded by crackling energy as he prepares to attack the alien.

EMERGENCY EFFECTS

“VIRUS for us was a ‘911 call,’” said Tippet. “They realized the full-scale prop was not going to deliver all the action, so they shot a lot of empty background plates.”

just said, ‘I’ll take a few bruises on a film like this, but I really like the idea of it. Why not!’ Not every actress—not every actor—is going to say that.”

Tracked down on the set of HALLOWEEN H20, Curtis explained her reason for exposing herself to VIRUS: “What attracted me was that it is actually an exciting story. It’s based on these comic books, which they sent me. I’d never done anything like that; I’ve never been in a sci-fi movie in my life. And the money was good, and the opportunity, timewise, was good for me, and that’s why I did it. It was physically very challenging, and I worked real hard to make my part of it good. The sets are unbelievable. It all takes place on this big ship. It’s far out.” Asked if she was contemplating comparisons to ALIEN-star Sigourney Weaver while considering the role, Curtis said emphatically, “No, not at all. I had no delusions of Sigourney Weaver-ness; that’s not my ticket.”

Co-star Joanna Pacula (THE KISS) likewise demurred when asked whether she and Curtis were replicating the Ripley-like female warrior image of producer Gale Ann Hurd’s ALIENS: “You know what?” she laughed, “This is an action film, so we all have guns!”

Pacula added, “I play a Russian scientist on the Russian ship who survived,” said Pacula, her accent mellifluous to the ear. “I’m the only survivor of the prior ordeal until the Americans get there...and then I don’t survive the movie!”

Her character may not survive, but Pacula herself managed to weather the rigors of the production, which included wind, rain, and immersion in fuel oil. “Strangely enough, it’s not as bad as you think,” she said. “Because it’s a real thing. I’d rather do the real stuff, and

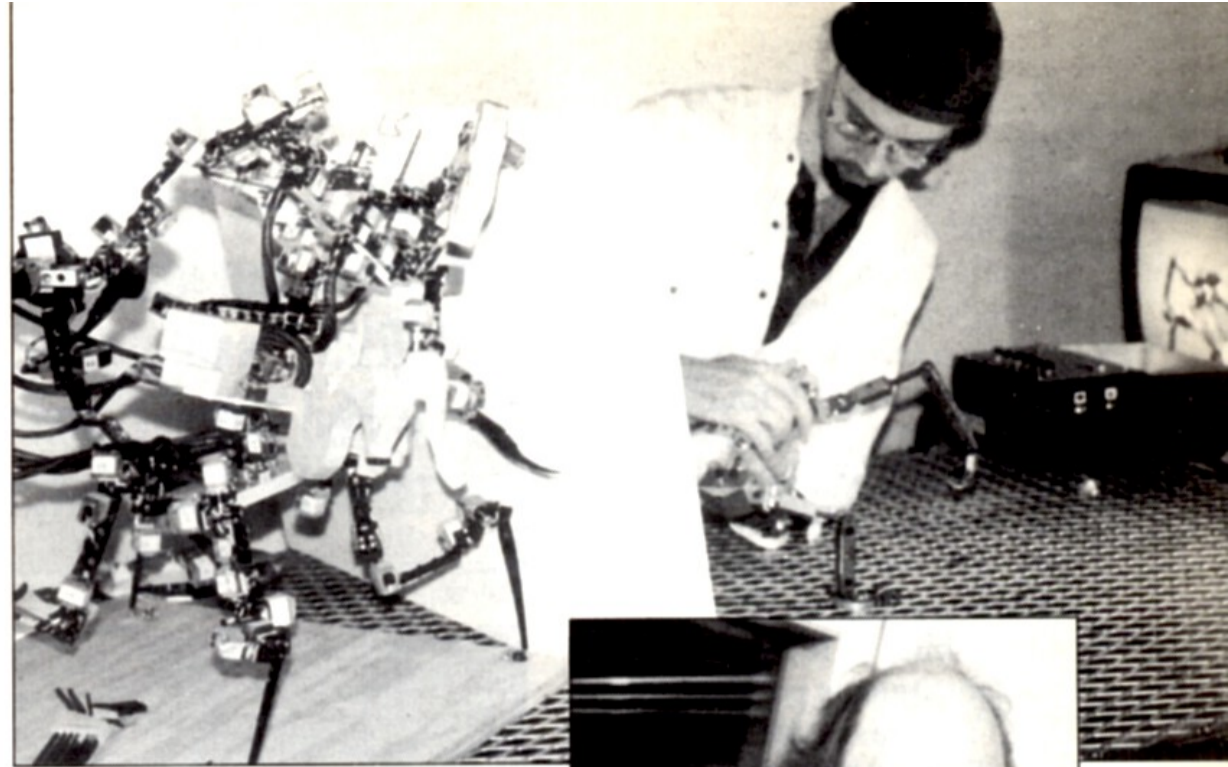
be blown by a real wind, than pretend. It was demanding physically, but I don’t mind that. I actually quite enjoy that. Bumps and bruises come with the territory.”

Along with the territory came a chance to work with Curtis. “Jamie’s terrific. She’s a very friendly person to work with, and she brings a lot of energy to the project. Working with her was a great experience.”

Regarding Curtis’ character, director Bruno added, “She’s a roughneck, and I’ve been trying to soften her up through the editing process. I want her to be more female and more real all the time. I like Jamie, and I want her to look good—she’s the star of the movie, but she’s very gracious. It’s a character piece with a group. Basically, when you see this group, they belong together as the crew on this tug. They totally fit.”

One of the actors fitting into the group was Marshall Bell (TOTAL RECALL). “The stars are Billy Baldwin, Jamie Lee Curtis and Donald Sutherland,” he explained. “Donald’s the captain. Then there’s the other five of us, and we kind of pair off. I pair off with a black actor named Sherman Augustus, and

Joanna Pacula stars as Nadia, chief science officer on the Soviet research vessel.



Above: Tom Gibbons animates the motion input device for a CGI robot that will be inserted into a background plate. Inset: effects expert Phil Tippet.



we go off down winding tunnels. My character’s name is Wood—and I’m the helmsman of the boat. Well, I die...and, oh, boy, do I see what kills me!”

Unlike DEEP RISING, which utilized an almost totally CGI creature, the robots of VIRUS are physically present, more like the “real” squid in 20,000 LEAGUES. “I would rather have the rubber squid [in 20,000 LEAGUES] get me,” said Bell. “Trust me, I’m telling the truth. I die way more horribly than did my counterpart in the comic book.”

The key factor of VIRUS is the enemy: an energy being capable of bringing machinery and tissue to life in a variety of horrific concatenations. VIRUS requires full-size creatures of various unspeakable types. “There’re a couple of main creatures,” said Bruno. “And there’re stages. There’s one that

we call the eight-footer, which is sort of one of the minions. It’s at least seven feet tall. One day, the creature was behind a door on a big crane arm. It enters the movie through a steel door by tearing it apart.

“The actors hadn’t seen this creature,” Bruno added. “They didn’t know what it was. Donald Sutherland was actually upset by it when he saw it. We swung it in, and then he was gone. Marshall told me later, ‘You know, Donald was completely crushed.’ He’d turned and walked off the set; it freaked him out. It kills Marshall Bell in the story. Joanna Pacula...I walked her in there to look at it. She stood and looked at it for awhile by herself and came out emotionally upset.”

Pacula herself had a different account of her confrontations with the full-size hybrid monsters made of tissue and machinery, driven by the alien plasma presence. “It was actually very interesting, because they’re computer-controlled machines with hydraulics and all that,” said the actress. “I didn’t know much about it—I still don’t know much about it. I understood some, and it was unbelievable to watch and realize that such things could be built. They did an incredible job

building that stuff."

Whereas Fay Wray had to imagine her "tall and dark leading man" in KING KONG, Pacula's actually found it much easier to work with life-sized working models. "Totally," she laughed. "It's always easier, yes, instead of imagining, because when you start imagining, 'Oh, how big this is,' it's always easier to have something which at least is as close to a substitute as possible."

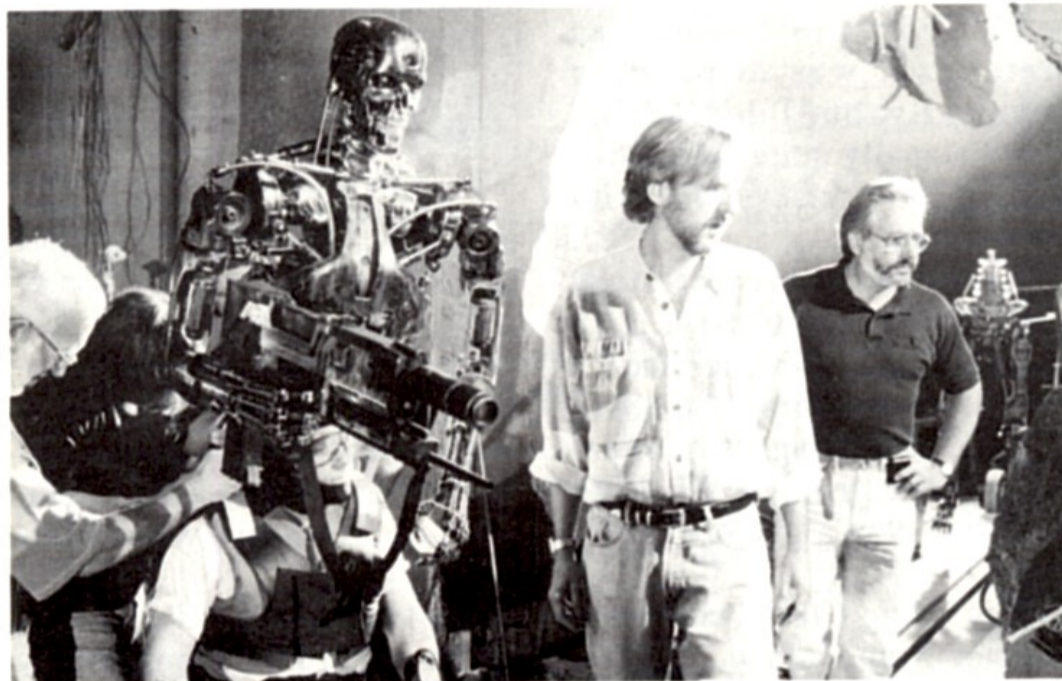
To the cast, the full-scale models may have been an effective substitute, but there was one regard in which they didn't quite satisfy the director. "This is a \$40 million plus movie," explained Bruno. "It's all on the screen, but there's one thing these things wouldn't do: I wanted them to walk, but they didn't walk—which got me in trouble," he laughed. "Enter Phil Tippett. The various large creatures are divided into the seven-footer, which is a puppet and a hydraulically-operated torso. I mean they all have multiple arms and multiple things on their faces. Swiss Army knife faces with little drill bits and claws. And then there's the Goliaths, which were 12 feet and bigger depending on whether they stood up. There were two of those, and we made them look like a lot of them. They wouldn't run down a corridor because they weighed five-six thousand pounds. But he made them do that! In those scenes with Goliaths—other than one scene when Jamie gets

Donald Sutherland (THE PUPPET MASTERS) stars as Everton, captain of the ill-fated tug boat, Sea Star.



THE TOUGHEST TEST SCREENING

"When Jim was mixing TITANIC, I brought in VIRUS," said Bruno. "I wanted to show it to Phil Tippett. Jim said, 'Show it to me.' I thought, 'Aw, shit, what if he hates it?'"



Before turning to directing, John Bruno (seen at right) worked on special effects for several James Cameron films, including TERMINATOR 2 (above).

grabbed and tortured for information by one of them—there's nothing there."

The enemy entity plays with flesh, as well as machines. "I called those bio-mechanoids," Bruno said, with a certain glee. "Those are the human-like robotic characters. They're part man, part machine. Our little character Squeaky, played by Julio Machoso, is the first one of the crew to disappear. Steve Johnson did this fantastic make-up job on him. It was a six- or seven-hour make-up that he had to wear twice. We shot for two days. Part of this is a camera system that works right over his eye. It looks like you're looking right into his brain. Julio did not like wearing makeup, because it was pretty gross. And then there's a puppet of him also.

"I'm so happy with what Steve Johnson's company did," Bruno continued. "Steve and I wondered, 'What would make something look really gross?' He gave me this book on human anatomy and dissections on corpses, and the only thing that looked really gross was when they peeled the skin off everything and you just had muscle and veins. So I told Steve: 'Everybody's going to be that!'

The "gross" factor was a

strain on the actors. "Some days [on VIRUS], I required a fair amount of make-up," said Bell. "I had to have life-casts made. You could do a whole story about how freaked out I get under the alginate. The make-up was mainly thoracic stuff. My death is extremely horrible. We're talking about alimentary canal stuff being rammed out, if you get my drift."

Fortunately, Bell had some experience with make-up. "I was pretty lucky. It wasn't my longest time in the chair. I had a nine-hour make-up on TOTAL RECALL!" said the actor, who in that film played George, the man with a Siamese twin embedded in his abdomen. "On VIRUS I often got to wear a sling. You know, you step into it and it gets all bloodied up. But I had some glue-ons and make-up. And then I get shot in the shoulder with a nail gun. I have nails sticking out of me all the time."

Marshall Bell also had a puppet made of him. "Oh, Marshall loses his head," Bruno said matter-of-factly. "We started getting very gross. There's a character we called Bio-Alexei, who's one of the Russian crew. He's the first one that our heroes actually get and study, trying to figure out what's going on. We

made a lot of that stuff, robotic droids. Then it happens to Donald Sutherland's character. He becomes one of these things."

So far Bruno is satisfied with his feature-directing debut. "We've had two previews. They've all been positive, which actually threw everybody in the studio, because women like the film. Jamie comes across really well. Joanna Pacula—she is a Ripley-esque character. It's nice to hear all the guys saying 'Who's the fox?!' She'll love to hear that. She comes off really well in the movie. So women seem to like the film a lot. They also think it's really gross!"

The audience previews may have gone well, but there was another screening that was an even bigger concern for the director. "I will share my biggest fear—it's really scary," Bruno related. "And it's not the usual pressures: are you going over budget, does anybody like you, etc. When Jim was mixing TITANIC at Skywalker Sound, he called me up and said, 'Hey, come on up here.' So I brought the film. I wanted to show it to Phil Tippett and the visual effects people, get them excited about it. That's how it was done for me. I'd see the film and realize I was part of it.

"Well, Jim said, 'Show the film to me.' And I thought, 'Aw, shit! What if he hates it?' And I showed the film to him. I sat there in the back, and he sat in the front in the big Lucasfilm theater up there in Skywalker Sound. We watched the whole movie, and I just sat there melting in the back! And he got up and looked at me and said, 'Well, you did your homework!' He loved it! He's a bi supporter. So then, he said, 'But maybe it's not so good that I make phone calls in your behalf. You associate yourself with me or vice versa, if TITANIC tanks, you go down with it. We all go down together.' And I went, 'I'm not worried about it.'"

Bruno's faith in TITANIC proved well-founded. His faith in VIRUS will be tested in August. □

Douglas Eby contributed to this article.

VIRUS

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Setting the stage for the film's big star.

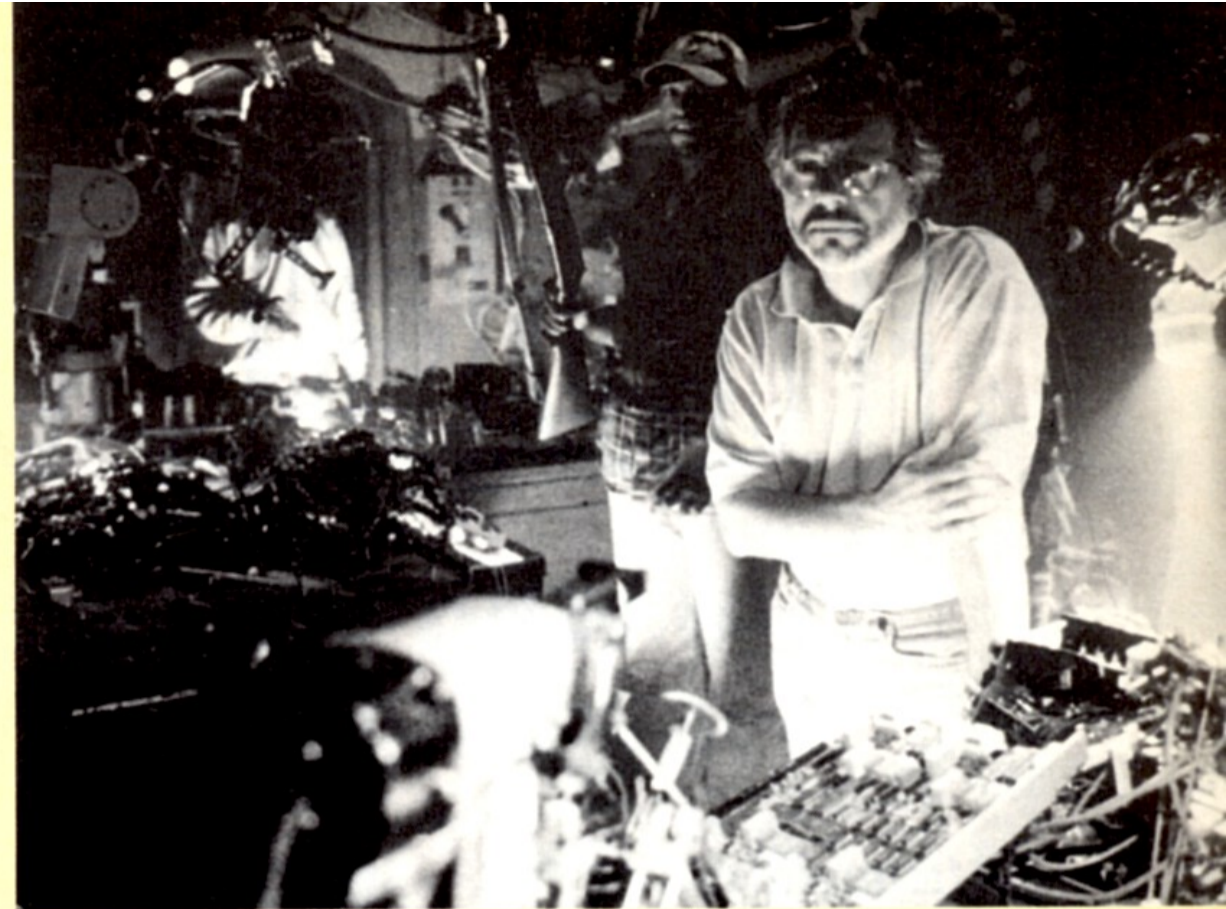
At 5' 6" tall, slender, and from a traditional Chinese background complete with girls' school, Mayling Cheng is the last person you would expect to find designing a big-budget, science-fiction-horror picture like *VIRUS*.

How did she get here? "I had worked on *TURBULENCE*, which was very complicated with a lot of gimbal work and mechanical hardware, which I'm very good at," she explained. "Through that film, I met John Bruno. John Bruno wanted a new designer with a different look. I guess he took a gamble on me! Maybe being Chinese helped; I don't know."

Born in a province outside Chun King, Cheng studied mathe-

atics in Taiwan, then switched to art when she came to the United States ("because my English was so bad," she says, in a charming accent that is now quite fluent). "Scientists, doctors and mathematicians all practice a form of art anyway," Cheng explained. "The creativity parallels are there in this century. I started off as a double major in math and art. Slowly, I leaned to art. Maybe it was working left brain to right brain. I took architecture because that combines art and mathematics."

But it wasn't her goal to be a production designer. "When I was a student, Orson Welles—just before he passed away—was looking for an architectural student to do some models and drawings for him. So I went to the interview and



Director John Bruno on production designer Mayling Cheng's set for the computer room, where parts and pieces are assembled to create the robots.

was very fortunate to work with him for three months. He was going to do a project called *THE CRADLE WILL ROCK*. I was going to be his art director on this project, which was to be an autobiography of himself. It was a disappointment when he passed away, but I think I learned spatial thinking from him. I learned a lot in the three months I was with him."

VIRUS takes place practically entirely onboard ships. "We had to build the Mir space station. We were dealing with tug boats, with water and gimbals, with large ships. My job is sets. I built a pilot house—the bridge of the tug boat. We put that set on a gimbal, which we ran hydraulically with a computer to make it look like it was on water—and on water during a hurricane. We had miniature models that weren't miniature. One was

40 feet, even though it was called miniature, but the real boat was about 800 feet long."

The science-fiction nature of the film created special problems for the production design, which had to take into account what sort of objects would be passing through the sets. "We had bionic creatures," she said. "I didn't design the robotic creatures; two special effects houses did. One was a ten-footer we called Goliath. The challenge is trying to take the robots into consideration: how tall he stands, how wide he swings. When you make your set, your priority changes. Accommodation of these creatures becomes a priority because they run on tracks and use hydraulics and power."

Goliath, for example, weighs tons. "It's like you take a station wagon or small tank and run it through your set! It was a new type of challenge for me because all this happens inside a vessel. Imagine that you have to feel you're on the water while this goes on. This ten feet by ten feet creature sits in your set. What do you do to house this creature while at the same time your set doesn't look like a palace? That's what I constantly battled with, but it turned out okay. The set looks good."

After *VIRUS*, Cheng's next project will be *GLORY, GLORY* with Ang Lee—a Civil War period piece. "I don't run into a lot of other women on these films," she admitted, regarding her tendency to end up on macho action pictures. "Everything I seem to do is masculine! I'd love to do a more traditional piece, but I haven't gotten an offer. But the stuff I'm doing is very complicated. With this kind of work, you have to be 'on' all the time. But I'm very fortunate, because I have very good training."

Chuck Wagner

Kit (Curtis) is pursued by the Goliath robot. Though the overall look of the film was claustrophobic, the sets nevertheless had to be large enough to accommodate full-scale working robots—some ten feet tall—that had to move freely within them.



CHILDREN OF THE CORN

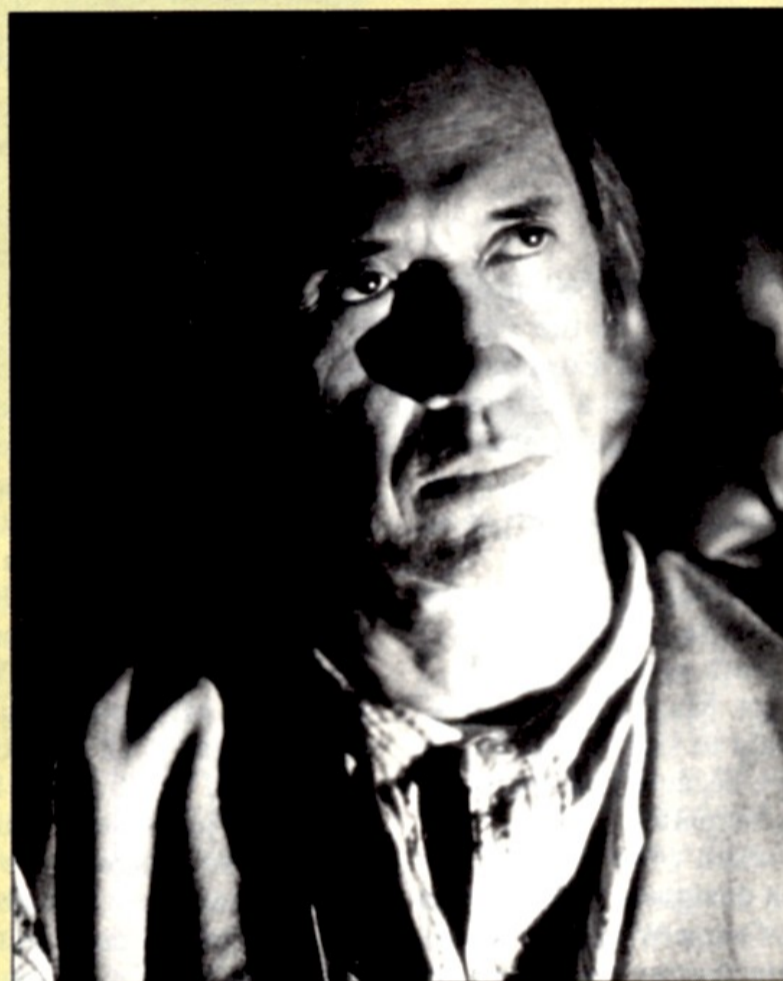
He Who Walks Behind the Rows walks again in this DTV sequel.

By Michael Beeler

When Stephen King wrote "Children of the Corn," in the 1970s, the image of rural children standing in flowing fields of corn, for many of us, came to symbolize evil at its very core. The movies, unfortunately, have not lived up to the printed words. King hated the first film, which was released in 1984. And the disjointed sequels—released in 1992, 1994 and 1996—have garnered even less praise. Still, the wonderfully wicked idea of kids gutting their parents in America's heartland, is enticing. So much so that Dimension Films, on July 21, plans to release direct-to-video their production of *CHILDREN OF THE CORN V: FIELDS OF TERROR*.

The working title to this latest edition of adolescent occultism was originally *FIELDS OF SCREAMS*, but it was changed a few months before release. "That was a decision by Miramax," explained Ethan Wiley, who wrote and directed the film. "I think that they wanted to stay away from that word 'scream' because that's their franchise. I totally understand and respect that, even though everyone thought that the original title was very clever. It always got a smile from people."

What Wiley was not willing to change was the initial premise of King's dark little yarn. "At a point, sequels or a series of films like this, they kind of come full circle," explained Wiley, who is best known for writing *HOUSE* and *HOUSE II: THE SECOND STORY*, which he also directed. "Different pathways have been tried by different film makers and different writers. There hasn't been a continuity, so to speak, with one writer or one director like you had with *SCREAM* or even with myself with the first *HOUSE* movies, where you kind of had someone with a connected vision between the different movies. Here it's really been different filmmakers doing their own thing each time. The second film takes place one second after the first one ends, so that approach was taken. Then the third one moved to an urban setting. So these kind of different roots have been explored. So the best



The newest entry in the franchise departs from previous installments in that the *Children of the Corn* are supervised by an adult cult leader, played by David Carradine.

thing for me to do was to kind of ignore those other movies and go back to the original source. And since the first film was very loyal to the original short story you couldn't do that, either. So it was a matter of finding my own personal take and my own inspiration based on Stephen King's short story."

Wiley's inspiration came from a little file on cults that he had been building upon over the years, filled with information about cults that he hoped to use in a film one day. "That's what really sparked me when I read the original short story," said Wiley, from his home in New York. "I remember thinking, 'God this is about a cult!'"

"I guess I have always had an interest or fascination with the mechanics of cults, the machinations of patterns that cults seem to fall into. And that was one thing the other films hadn't necessarily done."

The film takes place in Divinity Falls, a sort of anywhere USA small town. Four friends, played by Stacy Galina (Alison), Alexis Arquette (Greg), Eva Mendez (Kir) and Greg Vaughan (Tyrus), come to the rural

setting to spread the ashes of their recently deceased friend. They soon discover that Alison's runaway brother is a member of a mysterious local cult and is set to die because he is reaching the age of adulthood.

A few things, in comparison to the other films, were changed. The cult is led by a middle-aged man by the name of Luke, who is portrayed by David Carradine (*KUNG FU*). Most of the kids are older teenagers, with some towering over six feet tall. The age of sin has been changed from 19 to 18 years. And the 18-year-olds, who have reached the age of sin, no longer walk out into the corn to meet He Who Walks Behind The Rows; they now jump into the eternal flame that burns in a corn silo on the cult's ranch.

The contemporary, multi-racial cast also includes Fred Williamson (*FROM DUST TILL DAWN*) and two of Frank Zappa's children, Ahmet and Diva. Special effects make-up were done by Sota FX, which also worked on the fourth film. Visual effects were done by Netter Digital Entertainment. And the substantial amount of fire effects were developed and performed by Ken Wheatly and his son Eric.

The production was filmed 60 miles north of Los Angeles in the cities of Oxnard and Camarillo. "The reason we shot there was because it's the closest area to L.A. where you still have rural locations," explained Wiley. "It's a kind of combination where you have these beautiful orange groves or apple orchards or corn fields right next to big suburban housing developments. You angle your camera over a little bit one way, and you're in the middle of nowhere. You angle it over another way and you're right next to a big freeway and a mini-mall. It also gave us the access to Los Angeles for all the technical requirements. And because we were filming during the month of July, it also gave us some great weather."

Blue Rider Pictures, which has produced numerous horror sequels for such franchises as *LEPRECHAUN*, *WITCHBOARD* and *NIGHT OF THE DEMONS*, assisted Wiley in delivering his film on time and within budget. "*CHILDREN OF THE CORN V*

V: FIELDS OF TERROR



Dimension Films releases yet another direct-to-video installment in the CHILDREN OF THE CORN series on July 21; the original, abandoned subtitle was the tongue-in-cheek "Field of Screams." Right: Kir (Eva Mendez) falls under the spell of the evil cult. Below: the Children worship He Who Walks Behind the Rows.

was a producing for hire gig for Miramax," said producer Walter Joston. "It's not a picture that we developed. We just did the actual production as a work for hire. We do films like that because they hone our production skills and allow us to keep up relationships within the industry. You know, every time we do a film, we bring in many people who like to work with us and that we've worked with in the past. It's good to keep the production machinery honed."

Jim Issac, a friend of Wiley since they were eight years old, also assisted in the making of this film by doing extensive work as its second unit director. A number of sequences in the film were shot in tandem, with both directors shooting half of the same scene and then marrying everything together in the edit room. After his stint on this film, Issac went on to supervise the special effects for David Cronenberg's new film EXISTENZ.

Referring to the heart of what drove the film, Wiley said, "I think it's kind of a classic archetype of children, who are empowered with a supernatural spirit. There's something in the contrast or conflict of having children, who are usually considered innocent, personifying evil. I think it has always fascinated people and sparked their imagination as to what would happen if a child, with very different priorities and ideas, had those kind of powers. And how they would use those powers."

Concluding, Wiley admitted that the ending of the movie, like all the other films, runs counter to the short story in that it is up-beat. "The evil has been vanquished momentarily," said the director, who got his start in the industry by making Ewok feet at Industrial Light and Magic for THE RETURN OF THE JEDI. "But, God forbid it could come back again. You always leave that open for possibilities. That's part of the fun of it because you can never really get rid of evil. It's always going to be there." □



THE AVENGERS

Patrick Macnee recalls his long association with the series and discusses the latest feature.

THE AVENGERS' original John Steed, Patrick Macnee, remains as charming and active as ever, at 76; he still acts, and even has a cameo in the lavish new big-screen version of THE AVENGERS. The film was produced by Jerry Weintraub, directed by Jeremiah Chechick, and written by Don McPherson. Ralph Fiennes and Uma Thurman star as Steed and Mrs. Peel (the most popular combo from the series), and former 007 Sean Connery is the villainous Sir Alex de Wynter. Warner Bros. opens the film on August 15 in the hopes of establishing a feature film franchise.

But can THE AVENGERS really work in another medium?

Macnee poses behind the scenes with his most well-known female co-star, Diana Rigg, who played Mrs. Peel.



by
**James
Murray**

After all, it was once tried as a play which failed. "Oh, that was awful, too," said Macnee. "You see, the thing about THE AVENGERS is that the minds that created it were so clever, really, that they got it right, and it was made for television. I wouldn't have considered a movie of it at any time. And this man has just gone ahead and made one, and he may beat the odds. As long as they get the humor. I'm sure they'll get the humor. Ralph Fiennes is very sweet, very funny; I think he'll be very good."

Today, with the release of the movie, another new book on the series (Toby Miller's *The Avengers*), the success of his own book, and the release of the new digitally-remastered tapes of the series by Canal Plus, Patrick Macnee seems genuinely confounded by the on-going success of THE AVENGERS. "I'm so confused by this. I mean it's 30 or 40 years since I did this."

So why, does he think, is the series still a success a third-of-a-century later? "How the hell do I know? I've been with the bloody show for so long, I really don't have any opinions left." But he does, of course.

For Macnee, it began half-a-

lifetime ago with his "walking with \$8 in my pocket along Piccadilly in the pouring rain and a man coming out of a doorway and saying, 'Do you want to be my producer?'" So he accepted Edgar Peterson's offer to be a producer in April, 1960, for THE VALIANT YEARS, a television series about Winston Churchill. In November, 1960, he quit that job to take an acting role in a new series that was to be a revamping of a show called POLICE SURGEON—now retitled THE AVENGERS. "A man called Sydney Newman invented it," recalls Macnee. "He came up with the show, and he came up with the idea of the woman. He invented Doctor Who as well." But after a few episodes, Sydney Newman told Macnee that the Steed character wasn't very interesting, that it had no personality. Somewhat angered, Macnee spent time thinking about it and transformed Steed into a character based on his father, a racehorse trainer; the British hero, Scarlet Pimpernel; and Bussy Carr, his brave, aristocratic commanding officer in the Navy.

Originally, John Steed was a side-kick to the main character, Dr. David Keel, played by Ian Hendry. But in October, 1961, about a year after production began, explained Macnee, there was an actors' strike "and when we came back five months later, Hendry had become a movie star, so he had moved on." (Macnee would work with him



Warner's big-budget film THE AVENGERS (above)

again in 1976 when Hendry was hired as a guest star in THE NEW AVENGERS episode, "To Catch a Rat.")

After Hendry left, Steed became the central character. "There were already scripts written, so Jon Rollason [as Dr. Martin King] came in for a short time, and then Honor Blackman came in [as Cathy Gale] and played scripts that were written for Ian Hendry. Sydney Newman conceived that character as a mixture of Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, and Margaret Bourke-White, the very intrepid photographer for *Life* magazine."

At that time, the series was shot "live on tape" with the actors rehearsing for ten days and



re) is based on the 1960s TV show starring Patrick Macnee as John Steed, who makes a cameo with the new Steed, Ralph Fiennes (right).

then performing an episode in a studio before the cameras just as if it were a live broadcast. Consequently, those earlier episodes contain occasional “on air” artifacts: cameras changing lenses, out-of-focus shots, flubbed lines and the like. “Yes, yes. And people really enjoyed that,” recalled Macnee.

His memory isn’t always clear on specific details of the earlier episodes with Jon Rollason. “I really haven’t seen any of those or even the Honor Blackman ones. They embarrass me because they’re live television and you can’t be a good actor doing live television, not doing a series like that.”

Before THE AVENGERS,

Patrick Macnee had eight years of experience with live television: “We did PLAYHOUSE 90 and things like that in the ‘50s way before THE AVENGERS. That’s when I learned how to do live television in the United States. I did A NIGHT TO REMEMBER, which was about the sinking of the *Titanic*, written by Walter Lord. And the first person who ever did A NIGHT TO REMEMBER, before the movie, was George Roy Hill who became a famous director later [THE STING]. But at that time he sank the *Titanic* in a fish tank. It was an hour. It was all live. But it did teach me how to think on my feet.”

Many of THE AVENGERS’ live-on-tape episodes were

tightly written, with good acting and production values. Still, Macnee said, “We thought we were all right at the time, but you’ll be amazed at how many interviews you’ll read in magazines saying that show was perfectly terrible at that time, and I suppose they were right.”

Macnee and Blackman worked together on the series for two seasons, rehearsing and video-taping an episode every two weeks. The show became enormously popular internationally except in America, which had different broadcast technical standards.

About the recording of the novelty song “Kinky Boots,” Macnee said, “That was just a joke. Honor Blackman was



asked to do it, and foolishly she asked me. I couldn’t sing a note. I didn’t even know when to come in. But twenty years later, some disc jockey played it over and over, and it became an enormous hit for about six weeks. But then that’s the vagaries of our dear profession, don’t you think?”



Left: Macnee refused to carry a gun on the show, opting instead for an umbrella. Right: Rigg joined the show after establishing herself as a respected stage actress.

After Honor Blackman left to do *GOLDFINGER*, the producers decided to put the series on film to gain access to the world market. "Thank God when it went on film," exclaimed Macnee, glad for the luxury of rehearsing each scene individually and for the opportunity to do several takes.

Recalling the first filmed episodes, beginning with "Town of No Return," Macnee talked about Elizabeth Shepherd (*THE TOMB OF LIGEIA*), the first Emma Peel, "who was a sweet lady but wrong [for the part] and so they fired her." Eventually, Diana Rigg was hired: "I think she was just fantastic. Twenty-four years old. She had already played Cordelia [in *King Lear*], so she was no mean actress before she started work on *THE AVENGERS*."

Shooting on film, stunt arranger Ray Austin was able to make the fight scenes far more exciting than they could in the television studio. At Macnee's recent talk at USC, the students were all asking, "How do you get on with the director?" and the actor told them, "All they can do is direct the traffic, which is what they do in television because they don't have time to do anything else.

"A director should do what Di Rigg and I did," explained

Macnee. "Spend time—off time, not paid time—really getting into the character to the degree so that we really approached a character finally as if we were doing Dostoevski or a mixture of Dostoevski and Chekhov." And during that quality-time spent off-camera—is that when he and Rigg worked out the chemistry between the characters? "We didn't even know the word chemistry. We worked it out on logic—what the scene was about. If you know what the scene is about, you just do it."

And so there was no conscious effort on their part to set up the contrast between the characters? "None at all. 'Isn't

this dull? Let's do something about it'—that's usually what we said. We just were getting it right," he claims.

However the chemistry came about, it worked. And Macnee is obviously proud of the result: "I think the 26 black and white ones I did with Di Rigg were some of the best bits of film on television." Macnee credits this quality to the people who worked on the series "like James Hill, who directed *BORN FREE*, Charlie Crichton who directed *A FISH CALLED WANDA*, the lighting cameraman of *STAR WARS*—I can go through any number of people. They were some of the best-made television you could get

in 1964 and onward."

But filming those delightful episodes required intense work. "People always say 'Oh, you must have had so much fun making that series.' And people say to Diana Rigg, 'Oh, you were just part of the Swinging Sixties.' She said, 'Well, as far as I remember I went to a factory at 5:30 in the morning, and I came out of it at about 8:30 at night for four years.' And I know what she means. We didn't actually see life because we were making this series."

But the work paid off. In America, the black and white filmed series was picked up by ABC TV. "It was the first English show that was shown network in the US ever. In fact, I'm not sure that an English show has been shown since."

Macnee adds, "Brian [Clemens] wrote most of the stuff with Rigg, and then they fired him at the peak of his success." This was the period after Diana Rigg left the series, and Linda Thorson was hired. But Clemens and his partner, Albert Fennell, were hired back after only a couple of episodes when the production company realized the new producer wasn't working out. At that time, when Thorson came into the series as Tara King, Macnee recalled that the series was being modified for the American audience.

After Rigg left, replaced by Linda Thorson as Tara King (below), Macnee feels the show lost some of its British quality in order to appease the American market.



THE AVENGERS

RALPH FIENNES

The English Patient dons John Steed's bowler hat.

Ralph Fiennes had just come off his award-winning World War II romantic epic *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* when director Jeremiah Chechik approached him to recreate the role of John Steed for the big screen version of the '60s adventure *THE AVENGERS*. Fiennes accepted after reading Don MacPherson's screenplay.

"I love the old TV series," said the actor, "and Patrick MacNee created something so quintessentially English, with a wonderful mixture of eccentricity and likable cliché with his own particular brand of charm and *joie de vivre*. I can't help but be influenced by that, because he was Steed through the whole decade of the '60s. I had already absorbed Steed before I did the film; I knew the series and watched a lot of the old episodes, but there came a point where I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to imitate Patrick's Steed—I've got to have absorbed what he gave, what he created, and sort of make it my own.'"

Describing how he developed his view of a character known to so many fans, Fiennes said, "Steed's a perennial English gentleman of this century. I think he could have come from any decade of the 20th Century. I didn't go for a particularly '60s Saville Row look in my interpretation of him. I wanted something that I felt were gentleman's suits that fit across the whole span of this century. I think he's perhaps an ex-Guards officer who's gone on to work with an equivalent or secret division of the secret service, something like that. It's totally unspecified; it's just known as 'The Ministry'."

Although the original TV series was embraced by Americans in the 1960s, Fiennes is curious to see how the Britishness of the motion picture plays in the States. "That will be very interesting to see," said the actor, "because at the moment here in England there's a whole new sense of the country rediscovering itself. We've had this amazing general election result and, sadly, we're having this interview just over a week since Diana Spencer was killed. The effect everyone has felt from that is extraordinary, in the sense that we all are rediscovering our sense of identity as a country—those clichés of Englishness, particularly the monarchy, the establishment—all that has been thrown up to be talked about again, and Steed is a rather loving creation of the establishment."

"I do believe *THE AVENGERS* will have



Like Patrick Macnee, Ralph Fiennes' Steed wields an umbrella-sheathed sword rather than a gun in the feature film version of *THE AVENGERS*.

universal appeal," Fiennes continued. "The series has been hugely successful worldwide, and still is being played repeatedly everywhere. With John Steed and Emma Peel, there's a sort of sexual tension in the middle of the production which is always sort of played around with between them. There's a wonderful dynamic tension between the two of them, which we've tried to get hold of in this particular version. We have a wonderful designer named Stuart Craig, who I think has brilliantly captured the quirky eccentricities of the '60s, and sort of reinvented them alongside old, odd, funny English things like double-decker buses, red telephone boxes set in remote locations, and often deserted environments. For instance, there's a deserted Trafalgar Square covered by an Arctic blizzard. He's taking English things and slightly being anarchic with them, and you have this central duo in the middle, along with other characters, including the villain played by Sean Connery, who are all a bit larger than life and are rather extreme versions of stereotypes which I think people will recognize."

The production kept up a grueling schedule through the summer and fall of 1997. Dealing with recreating beloved characters in an epic feature film didn't give the principals much time to prepare for any stunts they would be required to perform in the timeless Steed/Peel tradition. For Fiennes, it was a matter of working close with the stunt crew and learning the necessary derring-do very quickly.

"The stunt guys would work out the action scenes, and I would come in, see what they did,

then do it myself, usually on the day it was to be shot. There are two extended fights: one is playful between myself and Uma, and the other is a very serious fight that comes near the end, between myself and Sean Connery. There is a brilliant swordsman, Bill Hobbs, who did all the stunts for the Ridley Scott film *THE DUELIST*, and he's wonderful at choreographing sword fights. I did extensive rehearsals with him for those two fights."

Fiennes' two co-stars in *THE AVENGERS* left the leading man with nothing but high praise. "Uma brings extraordinary height—ha!—and great sexuality to the role," said Fiennes. "She's extraordinary looking, wonderful to work with, very, very gracious with a great sense of humor. She's really cool in just the right way, and I think she's reinvented Emma

Peel brilliantly. Sean plays this maniacal eccentric who controls the weather patterns over England and the rest of the world, and he, well—it's Sean. It's James Bond gone on acid!"—he laughed—"I think Sean wanted to play Sir August de Winter as a larger than life villain. He's got a great sense of humor which he brought to the script—great jokes and one liners. He's brilliant at that. He brings his own particular energy and presence to the set, which is unlike anything I've encountered before. It is something unique about him."

THE AVENGERS film, much like the television series, works to create a stylized world, just off-center enough to let viewers know that there is much mischief around any corner. "The style of the film was lifted from and reinvented from the old series," said Fiennes. "It is unique; it's unlike any other action-thriller that I know of. *THE AVENGERS* has a great sense of humor, and treads this delicate line between pastiche and something serious. And the subtle undertone of attraction between Steed and Emma is like a romance that's always just about to happen but never quite does. I think that's unusual. The action sequences are not really heavily sweaty and violent—it's not *RESERVOIR DOGS*—there's a style even to the action sequences which is different. It's very particular and unique. And as for the relationship between Steed and Emma, the audience are kept guessing about that all the time, so they can fantasize about what they might like to have happen, but they're never really going to know. That's the secret."

Fred Szebin

THE AVENGERS

SEAN CONNERY

The former 007 as the cold-hearted Alex de Wynter.

In their long and unique career, John Steed and Emma Peel faced a most singular assortment of villains, ranging from heavily-armed modern-day suffragettes, lumbering cybernauts, assorted fascist baddies, and the living dead. Now, they face the wrath of Sir August de Wynter, who—appropriate to his name—has developed a way to control the world's weather from his underground lair. Only the ultra-stylized Avengers can overcome the champagne villain whose obsession with the leather-clad adventuress drives him to dire deeds.

Adding his own panache to the nouveau-retro chic mixture of THE AVENGERS is Sean Connery in the first major villain role of his career. TARZAN'S GREAT ADVENTURE (1959) cast the future 007 as one of a group hunting the ape man, but this new version of the 1960s TV show allows the Scot to take on the entire world. It is almost poetic irony that the man who was Bond—a character that affected so much in the trend and style conscious 1960s—should now be showcased in the revival of yet another of that decade's pop culture icons.

"I knew something about THE AVENGERS, having seen it on the old black and white screen," said Connery. "It had a sense of style about it. When I read the first script for the film, I knew that Ralph was playing Steed and that Uma Thurman was playing Emma Peel, which made a major difference about whether I would do it or not, because unless the stars make it work, no matter how good or bad your villain is, the piece won't work. But Ralph and Uma are perfect, even better than I had imagined when I read it. I'd never worked with either of them before. I nearly worked with Uma when she was only 17, which was less than a year ago, I think. She's a joy, so once we got into what we wanted to do with Sir August—make him much more of an operatic and eccentric villain, and put him in a much richer vein—I saw that it was going to work.

"We went from soup to nuts with Sir August," Connery added on his involvement with fleshing out his character. "Jerry Weintraub, who I must say is a real first class producer, a real pro of the old school, and Don MacPherson, who had written a very excellent script, and had written two or three different versions of what I had read, came down to my home in Spain, and we went through the whole thing.



Sean Connery's villainous Sir Alex de Wynter squares off with John Steed (Fiennes).

We had two or three conferences, all in agreement, before they made the journey, and then we thrashed it out. Once we finished that trip, I'd more or less agreed to do the picture. The only condition I made was that we should compress all the stuff so that it had at least comparable visual impact to what was already in the piece, which meant us going to places like Blenheim for the big organ, and a great, magnificent library and hall, and Stowe Castle for this magnificent ballroom sequence, which has a space and grandeur all its own. Roger Pratt, the cinematographer, is marvelous, and I have to say, collectively, there is a wonderful crew, really first class. I'm thrilled to see so many true professionals are creeping back in, as it were, to the beleaguered film business of Britain. THE AVENGERS has been a much better experience than I had on FIRST KNIGHT, where I arrived after they'd been shooting for six weeks and morale was on the floor. There was a big problem with the British and the Americans, and one had to get in the middle and attempt to resolve some of the problems, but there's nothing like that on this picture. They are a really terrific crew, and they're all highly professional and humorous."

The humor—or humour—of THE AVENGERS was always a major part of its success—an off-center, surreal view of the world, where high fashion is a given, and maniacal over-throwers of the world create their own piece of reality to suit their twisted natures. Sir August isn't any different, and has, at one point, a teddy bear party in which Connery

serves as head teddy, counseling the other eight fluffies in attendance. But Sir August also has a darker side, which includes an obsession with Mrs. Peel that takes him to the point of creating an evil clone of her, the copy and master-print both played by Thurman.

THE AVENGERS' larger-than-life England where such actions can take place was not only filmed on actual locations, but also housed in the country's biggest studios—Pinewood and Shepperton—where London locales such as Trafalgar Square were recreated. Orchestrating it all is director Jeremiah Chechik, for whom Connery has nothing but praise. "He's got a marvelous combination," says Connery. "He's a great enthusiast, and very, very skillful about what he wants. Jeremiah understands all the technical aspects of the picture, and is allowed to focus

on the making of the film because Jerry Weintraub, the producer, works to ease the burdens of filmmaking so that the director can be free to direct the movie. When a director is wearing both hats, it frequently becomes a conflict of interest. Jeremiah can feel an enormous relief because he has one of the best producers in the business, who is here every day, and the two of them become interdependent and totally productive. And, as I say, Jeremiah has a marvelous sense of humor. There is a surrealist element in the movie which we've gone after, and they say MacPherson's captured that too in his script at every opportunity, tried to revive and keep it in that kind of vein, and I think we've succeeded. The production team is fantastic; Stuart Craig's designs are wonderful.

"This is a unique film," Connery continued. "I haven't seen MEN IN BLACK, but I've seen different pieces of it. There are elements about that which I can see where it has a specific sense of humor and seems very assured in where it's going, and I can understand why an audience would like it. It's quite absurd—a lot of the dialogue and the things the characters are doing—but it has an underlining seriousness, and yet it's a little wacky, with the guys delivering these lines like the old DRAGNET people, talking about the most absurd things, but with total reality and conviction. It makes for a marvelous paradox, and this film has the same manner. Ralph is a fabulous formidable actor, and Uma is marvelous in this film. She's got all these costumes and legs up to armpits; she looks terrific."

Fred Szebin

"The old series left something to the viewer's imagination," said Macnee, feeling that explaining everything to the audience was a mistake: "They brought this Mother character in to explain the plot, and it made it ponderous. And also it made it obvious. People said to me, 'Well, you weren't ever employed by anybody.' But that was the whole point. You see, there's an American feeling that there's got to be a sense of order and bureaucracy. There hasn't. That's why the English were such good Colonials—because they could manage people by not giving the impression of managing them. The Americans want to come in and make it all happen."

In fact, that's exactly what happened with the series. Because it was being financed, in part, by ABC-TV, an American representative of the network came in and tried to take control. Doing so, Macnee thinks, ruined *THE AVENGERS*—destroyed the charm, the mystery, and the elements that made it essentially British. "If they had left us as we were, we would have been much more successful."

So, with the demise of the series, in the spring of 1969, after nine years, Macnee hung up his bowler, only to dust it off seven years later. In 1976, after forming their own production company, Brian Clemens, Albert Fennell, and composer Laurie Johnson called Macnee back into service for *THE NEW AVENGERS*. "I shouldn't have done it at all. They should have done it with Gareth Hunt and Joanna Lumley, and they would have had an enormous success. But they foolishly brought me back, and I agreed to it. I was 55 years old when I was doing it." Fighting arthritis even then, Macnee appears agile on camera. "THE NEW AVENGERS," recalls Macnee, "wasn't so much like factory work because I had a lovely little cottage close by, and I remember we had a lot of fun."

And what does he think about the quality of *THE NEW AVENGERS*? "Very good," said Macnee, though he felt the episodes didn't measure up to the old ones: "You see, in the old *AVENGERS* we were ahead of our time, and in *THE*

CLASSIC EPISODES

"I think the twenty-six black-and-white ones I did with Di Rigg were some of the best bits of film on television," said Macnee, "the best made television in 1964 and onward."



Peel (Rigg) and Steed (Macnee) face undying adversaries in one of the series' memorable episodes "Never, Never Say Die," guest starring Christopher Lee.

NEW AVENGERS I thought we were slightly behind. I mean why didn't they have computers or ESP or all the things that people take for granted."

Macnee regreted that the scripts in the new series didn't take advantage of cutting-edge technology or paranormal phenomena. "I mean we didn't quite take advantage of that in *THE NEW AVENGERS*, and I thought we were a bit behind *KOJAK*. But there were about four of them which are very good. There was one about birds ["Cat Amongst the Pigeons"] that was very good and almost got the three of us having extra-sensory perception. We should have had that; I mean you could have gotten away with that."

Yet, at the time, producer-writer Brian Clemens took pride

in making the series different from the old one, which is why it was called *THE "NEW" AVENGERS*. "Yes," Macnee recalled, "he wanted to make it more realistic, and I think it was a pity." Also, Macnee regreted that "we had to get it ready too quickly. I think that was the first time we went 'Hollywood' in the sense that we had to deliver when we weren't quite ready, which is the case with a lot of series now." Finally, at the end of *THE NEW AVENGERS*, Macnee hung up his bowler for good. "I don't think I've worn those sort of clothes ever since."

Does Macnee own a bowler hat? "No. They ask me to autograph them, and they sell them at some enormous price...for about \$2000," he said, adding, "I'm delighted that people remember me after all this time."

Looking back on a decade of playing the same character, what worked? What didn't? And what would Macnee have done differently? "I'll tell you what I would have liked about *THE AVENGERS*. Quite simply, when Honor Blackman came into the show, she was just darling. If she had come onto film with me, we would have done five years and sold abroad; it would have been one of the most successful shows ever; it would have finished, and we would have made a lot of money and had a great success, and there would have been no rest of the show. The rest of the show is too much of it, too long; we repeated ourselves. It was a great idea; it started wonderfully. But the best person who acted with me, by a long way, was Ian Hendry. He was just great: his perception, his depth, his understanding. That was when we worked out the show, the characters, because it was at the beginning. I'm all for the beginnings. I'm an Aquarian. The excitement and conception of *THE AVENGERS* was wonderful. The repetition was numbing." And when did repetition set in? "Oh, just before Diana Rigg. We had already repeated the Ian Hendry episodes with Honor Blackman. And then with Diana Rigg we repeated all the ones we had done with Honor Blackman. We repeated ourselves on the color ones. Well, can you imagine if you're the person who's been there all the time? Particularly if you earned minimal fee."

At what point in the series did he feel that the character of Steed crystallized? "It never crystallized," claimed Macnee. "The great thing about television is when you think you have a hold on the audience, you never have quite. So a character never actually crystallizes. It changes by happenings, world events, deaths in the family, a dog dying, or whatever. All of those things alter a character. And turning up for work day by day and doing scenes with different people change you. I mean you keep the basic character because you don't want to frighten the horses, but basically it never quite crystallizes because hu-

manity never crystallizes.”

In that case, was it a luxury to work in a series where he could change a character as time moves on? “Oh, I think so. I played *Sleuth* on Broadway for sixteen months. You have to live off stage as if you were in a monastery because of the intensity of the character, because the man is murderous and a psychopath. Towards the end you begin to feel repelled by yourself because of what you have to do; you almost want to kill somebody, and that’s dangerous.

“I played Steed as though I was a straight man [for the actresses to play off]. And I think that’s why I lasted so long, because I didn’t try to do too much. You can’t do too much to him, or people get tired of you.”

Macnee claimed that he has always “called [the show] a comic strip.” Fortunately, that comic strip has been profitable over the years, thanks to the continued success of the series and to the fact that he managed to get a 2.5 percent royalty built into his contract when the series went to film. Getting paid, however, hasn’t been easy.

“The only reason I’m into THE AVENGERS again is because I suddenly realized we were all being cheated out of monies that was ours, and I thought I’d better do something about this. And also, these dreadful prints were being pirated all over the United States, and I wanted [the public] to see the show as it really was.” He elaborated: “When they were shown on A&E, the pirates got hold of them and put them out, and we spent three years in the courts getting the pirates off our back, and thank god they had to

Before Diana Rigg, Honor Blackman co-starred with Macnee as Cathy Gale in taped episodes of THE AVENGERS.



THE NEW AVENGERS

“I shouldn’t have done it,” said Macnee of the series revival. “They should have done it with just Gareth Hunt and Joanna Lumley, but they foolishly brought me back.”



Patrick Macnee returned as John Steed in producer Brian Clemens 1970s revival THE NEW AVENGERS, starring Gareth Hunt and Joanna Lumley.

pay heavy damages.”

It distresses Macnee that the episodes shown on the Arts & Entertainment network were not intact: “Fifteen minute were cut out of each episode. They were lacerated and punched and sliced and pierced,” to make room for more commercials. In fact, so much is missing that some episodes didn’t even make sense. But recently, tapes of the original filmed series and also THE NEW AVENGERS have been released by Canal Plus, the latest of a half-dozen different owners of the series over the years.

Macnee does take credit for helping track down the original negatives “which we found in a vault at Pinewood” and getting them restored so that “now you see the shows as they were done, and there’s a hell of a difference. I mean I’m delighted that it’s been digitally restored from the original negatives.”

He’s especially proud of the efforts he’s put into getting the actors paid their royalties: “We came from the stage; we worked at it; we paid our dues; and we got paid very little for doing it. That’s why I work so hard now to get what they call residuals or profit participation.

And us little people who did good, good work, of which I’m immensely proud, should get paid. I think they’ve been showing this show in some form or another ever since it was made. I know it was shown in 87 countries.

“Looking back on them, I think some of them were absolutely marvelous. I’m very proud of what we made, particularly that black and white series [with Diana Rigg]. That was the best we did, I thought. I’m looking at them in a detached way, not related to myself.”

Most people would agree that the black and white filmed series was quintessential AVENGERS: clever, sophisticated, witty. So what about the humor in the series? Was most of it already in the scripts? “Yes. Brian Clemens is a very good writer. You wouldn’t want to do something with me in it and not be that way. When I first went in it, I was a contrast to Ian, and I think I had become that sort of man by that time. I was damn near 40 when I started with him, so I had had time to form myself as a person. So I wasn’t playing a character. I just used what I had gained, and irony is one of my main sort of

things, and having been throughout a long life, I should have been shot dead before I was 25... anything after that is a joke. Ian Hendry used to say, ‘Do you always have to make a joke about these things?’ I know it can be awfully boring.”

One thing that helped make the show timeless was that “social conscience” was deliberately stripped from its world. Yes, there were bad guys, ruthless villains, and “crimes against the people and the state,” but there was no social injustice, no poverty, no misery in the series. THE AVENGERS was wrapped in a world of privilege, not despair. And, of course, that’s the very reason we enjoyed stepping into its fantasy world: it offered escapism. So in talking with Patrick Macnee, it seemed ironic somehow to discover that this man who shaped such an amoral character as John Steed is, himself, a man with strong social convictions; a man who is up to the moment on current events; a man who is intensely concerned, at a moral level, with what’s happening in the world—at home, in China, and in Eastern Europe.

“Let’s not take pride and joy in the fact that we can now get a Walkman for \$10, and it says made in China on it,” cautioned Macnee. “To pay \$10 when you know it’s been made by slave labor, does that make me feel good? No it doesn’t.”

“In today’s world,” Macnee continued, “the main problem is overpopulation. The population is so extraordinary, everybody feels they deserve a place, not necessarily in the sun, but at least in the world, the poor darlings. Our governments don’t seem quite able to cope with looking after the number of people that exist.”

“Let’s have some irony in the world. Let’s have some reality in the world. Let’s have some thought in the world. Why doesn’t a think tank sit down and just think what are we doing wrong with the world?” Macnee exclaimed. And so, Macnee’s conversation about THE AVENGERS is interwoven with thoughts about world politics, corporate greed, the le-

THE AVENGERS

UMA THURMAN

Filling Mrs. Peel's leather suits.

Although die-hard fans of the video-produced first season may consider Honor Blackman's Cathy Gale John Steed's best partner in *THE AVENGERS'* television run, it is Diana Rigg's sexy Mrs. Emma Peel that is most indelibly imprinted on most memories, and that is who joins Ralph Fiennes' John Steed in the motion picture.

Filling the leather suit on the big screen is the equally sensual Uma Thurman, so good in *PULP FICTION* and one of the few reasons to see *BATMAN AND ROBIN*. As in the series, Emma Peel is very much an emancipated woman: a meteorologist, weather specialist, anti-matter fission-fusion expert—and someone not to be trifled with in a martial arts fight. For big screen adventure, Emma, suspected of a crime she did not commit, finds herself becoming a secret agent by necessity as she works to clear herself and help Steed fight off the weather-controlling scheme of Sir August de Wynter (Sean Connery), who is so obsessed with the lovely scien-

tist that he has cloned an evil version of her.

Accepting the role as one of the sexiest fighters of evil in TV history wasn't a tough decision for Thurman, who remembered watching the series as a child. "I always wanted to work with Ralph," she said. "I had the privilege of meeting him before, and admire his work a lot. I'd read a version of the script several years before that [producer] Jerry Weintraub had sent me, and when it came back around it just seemed like it was coming back to me for a reason: Ralph was in it, and I thought he was perfect for the part, and it's a really good female character; she's positive and intelligent and witty, and a sort of superwoman with a tongue in cheek twist, just very charming. I thought this would be an interesting, different style of movie for me to make, and I knew it would be special, so I thought I would just take a whack at it."

For the film, as in the series, London is portrayed, according to Thurman, as "a mod, futuristic, '60s-influenced world, as if that



In the film, Mrs. Peel (Uma Thurman) scrambles to put a stop to the weather-controlling schemes of Sir August de Wynter, which blanket England in snow.

sort of style transformed and has elements of very elegant modernism, but in a very combined, whole way. So, we're somewhere, sometime ahead, somewhere behind. It's meant to be a mysterious, escapist kind of experience."

The 1960s and 1990s have jelled very happily in the film, as Thurman believes they have in the real world where the rest of us have to live. "Some things always come back in style," she said. "You remember in the '70s and '80s, everyone was like, 'Oh, that disgusting '60s architecture, and those terrible bell bottoms,' and the same thing about certain '70s disco looks; once we passed into the '80s, everyone wouldn't be caught dead wearing them. I notice that in the '90s all that stuff has come back as time pieces, and the style has been thoroughly appreciated again. So, in a way, the movie is sort of meeting with what's happening in that way as well."

Thurman finds herself working with Sean Connery double-time on *THE AVENGERS*, as regular old

Emma trying to stop the power-mad de Wynter from controlling the world's weather for profit and revenge, as well as the dark, soulless Evil Clone of Emma Peel. "Sean was wonderful," she enthused. "It was very exciting working with him. I never imagined I'd get to work with Sean Connery. It was really thrilling, and when I heard he was going to do the movie it was a very exciting day for me. I've never seen him really play a villain, and his character in *THE AVENGERS* was incredibly charming and seductive. I didn't really know he was a villain the entire time, which is perhaps more insidious than anything else, which was wonderful. And he has an extraordinary ability to carry off some very silly costumes. We all had to do that! But Sean has big shoulders. I think he can embody, or express whatever he likes. He's such a massive personality and has so much energy and incredible charm that he could probably wear a black garbage bag and carry it off."

Fred Szebin

Thurman describes Emma Peel as "a really good female character—she's positive and intelligent and witty—a sort of superwoman with tongue in cheek."



gal system, modern journalism, and government conspiracy. Such a social conscience would be entirely alien to John Steed.

“One of the things about THE AVENGERS was it was anarchy. Life is anarchy. Because the reality behind pomposity and bureaucracy anyway is corruption and, of course, that can’t be shown.” That’s why Macnee feels THE AVENGERS worked best when it showed the partners working on their own—apart from any bureaucracy.

Another social problem works its way into the conversation: the issue of violence on television. It’s a topic Patrick Macnee has strong feelings about because “I saw all my friends blown to bits in the Second World War. When they asked me why I wouldn’t carry a gun that was the reason I gave. They still didn’t understand because nobody who has not been shot or seen his friends blown to bits knows that’s what the hell violence is all about. They put it in because they think people want it. They don’t want it.”

Discussion of violence spills over into machismo. What was it like for Macnee to play a refined male character that wasn’t macho? “Never thought about it,” he says. “Oh, it wasn’t macho in those days, the ’60s, was it? I think it’s much more macho since the invention of Arnold Schwarzenegger and that other dreadful man, Sylvester Stallone. They’re like people who drive motor cars with long hoods—they just have to compensate for something or other. You don’t have to have an Uzi machine gun. In those days you didn’t talk about sex; you just did it. You didn’t talk about violence; you didn’t do it. Things were very different, I think.

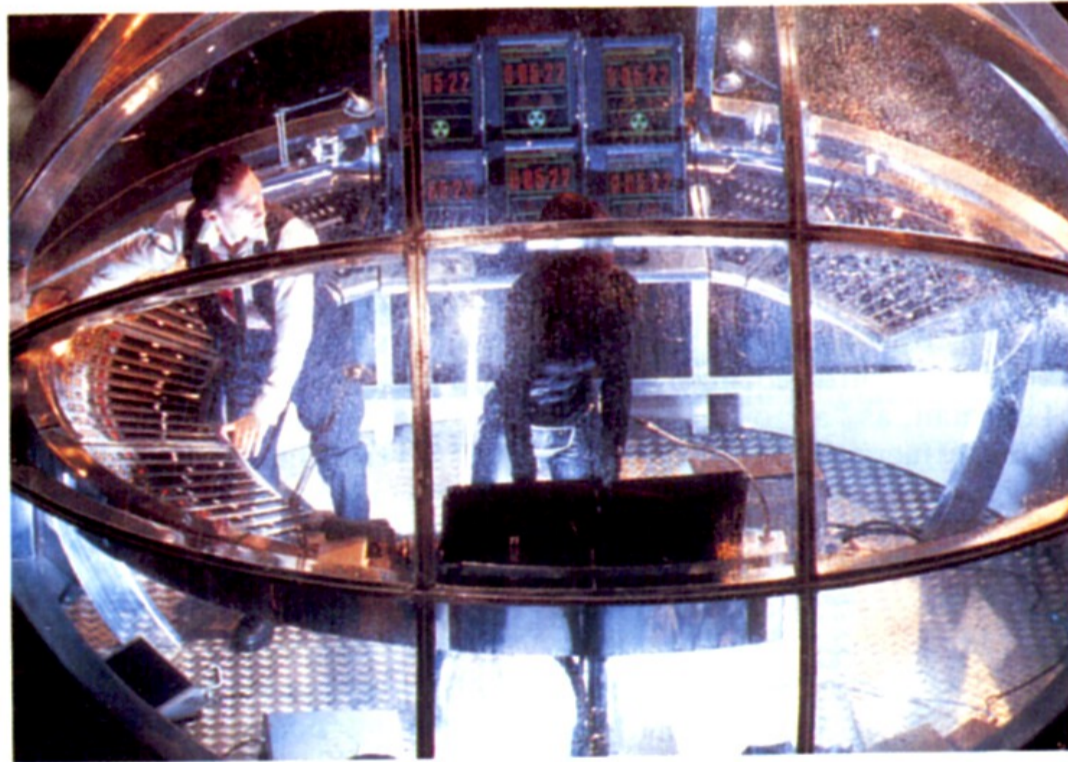
“You see, that’s where I think I’ve done a tiny bit of contribution,” he added. “And when I asked Ralph Fiennes, ‘Are you going to wear all of that the bowler hat and umbrella and everything in the ‘90s, in the realistic ‘90s?’ he said, ‘Oh yes.’ And I said, ‘Are you going to carry a gun?’ and he said, ‘Oh, no!’ And I thought, *My god, here’s a real man.* What a lovely thing to say. No gun. In this day

MACNEE ON STEED

“Wouldn’t you be excited if you were interviewed 20 years later for something that you never thought would get past the next two or three months?”



In the film, Alex de Wynter (Connery) is obsessed with Mrs. Peel (Thurman). Steed (Fiennes) and Peel (Thurman) race to put a stop to de Wynter’s plans to control the world by creating catastrophic conditions.



and age? And he’s playing THE AVENGERS as a leading man—in the age of Willis, Schwarzenegger, James Bond who kills people within the first 15 seconds of the movie—he’s doing it with no gun? And if I’ve done nothing else, in 1960—when I refused to carry a gun and they said ‘Well, what will you carry?’ and I thought frantically and said ‘an umbrel-

la’ because I couldn’t think of anything else—I really set a pattern, so that 35 years later, a young man says to me in a major movie, ‘I’m not carrying a gun.’ I thought, *Well, I have contributed something.* It’s an oversimplified way of saying things, but it implies that with an umbrella, intelligence, and a certain adroitness, breeding, background, and education, you

can occasionally come out on top.”

Over the years, with more than a decade of his life wrapped up in the character, has he felt confined by Steed? “Yes, a little bit.” And doesn’t he find it tedious to be interviewed about something he did so long ago? “Wouldn’t you be excited if you were interviewed 20 years later for something that you never thought would get past the next two or three months?”

But what are the payoffs of devoting so much of one’s professional effort to a single character? “It’s made me known all over the world. Very fine financially. And most important of all, given me the ability almost everywhere I go to be recognized and have people say, ‘How are you?’ They know who you are, and you immediately meet lots of dear people who you wouldn’t otherwise get to know that quickly.”

Yet being asked to glance back over what he called the “many many acres of time” that went into making the original series and to identify some of the highlights, Macnee seemed bewildered: “What does one make of Honor Blackman leaving? What does one make of Diana Rigg leaving? What does one make of having to wait another year to get another woman? All the ups and downs?” He found it overwhelming. Besides, he dealt with it all in his book.

What can readers expect from this new book, *The Avengers and Me* (co-authored with Dave Rogers)? Most of it “is based on what it’s like to work with the ‘suits,’ in other words, the executives. I’ve done quite a good thing on acting in it; I’ve done quite a good thing on what it was like to be in the series; and I’ve done quite a good thing, I think, in showing what it’s like on a day-to-day basis which a lot of people I don’t think ever quite visualized. They think we just danced on the screen and it all happened.” Macnee was surprised at how well the book sold in England.

And looking back over the series, is Patrick Macnee pleased with the “acres and acres of time” he spent as John Steed in THE AVENGERS? “Very happy.” □

THE AVENGERS

EDDIE IZZARD

Cult comic plays Connery's bodyguard.

He's a household name in Great Britain. But while he plays to cult audiences in New York, very few Americans will have heard of comedian Eddie Izzard. The award-winning stand-up comic stars as Sir August De Wynter's vicious bodyguard Bailey in *THE AVENGERS* and it's a role he hopes will elevate his recognition in the acting community after his appearances in *THE SECRET AGENT*, *HANGING AROUND* and Todd Haynes' Glam Rock drama *VELVET GOLDMINE*.

Izzard is a highly controversial eccentric figure because he's open about his sexuality, bravely displays his transvestism by wearing high heels and make-up on stage, and acts on his social and political beliefs in ways that the British public have warmly embraced. He said, "When I was younger I always wanted to act but I didn't realize you could actually specialize in it. Then I discovered *MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS*, got deflected, and thought I'd exclusively do comedy. I didn't really get anywhere until stand-up be-

came the Big Thing and audiences seemed to love what I did. I adore stand-up and I'll do it forever, but as I'm in the position to take a stab at acting now, why not try and see what happens?"

He continued, "Basically, I've decided I just want to play absolute assholes in movies. I'm following in the fine tradition of Woody Harrelson from *CHEERS*. He went from being a comic barman to a psychotic serial killer in *NATURAL BORN KILLERS*. It's sound weird but I can understand why he would want to do that as both characters deal in behavioral extremes. It's an empirical truth."

Izzard professed to having no idea why he was hired to be in *THE AVENGERS*. "Like everyone else I was mad about the series. I always wanted to be Emma Peel! And I've always wanted to work with Sean Connery. But as someone has already pointed out, I'm not working with him, I'm standing next to him! I play Bailey for no other reason than they asked me to play him. Jeremiah Chechik probably knows why he cast me so, when you ask him, will you tell me?"

British comedian Eddie Izzard hopes his role as the silent sidekick to Sean Connery's supervillain, Alex de Wynter, will launch his stateside career.



Izzard, dressed to the nines for his off-Broadway review "Dress To Kill."

He continued, "I'm the second baddie to Sean's major baddie in the movie. I wanted to be the first baddie but Sean got there first and he is slightly better known than me. I kept half expecting them to fire Sean and plead with me to play his role instead. Hey, I have just as much right to do it. I was in a film called *The Secret Agent* and I do wear James Bond T-shirts around the set. Bailey is a real tom boy—a combination of gunplay and mascara. They say he's 'Deliciously nasty'. That's good because the very first review I ever received was 'Izzard is superb as a Nazi thug in the making'. So I do feel I'm confidently exploring the darker side of my character."

When he first told close friends he was up for a part in *THE AVENGERS*, everyone thought he'd be a shoo-in to play Mother. Izzard laughed, "But that would hardly be a stretch now, would it? Bailey is basically a two-dimensional heavy whom I'm trying to three-dimensionalize within the parameters of turning up on screen every so often, staring at people and chewing gum. It's a tricky job because I have no dialogue at all. There originally were three lines

for me to speak but I took them out thinking it would be best if he remained silent. This job is truly money for old rope."

Nevertheless, Izzard is trying to do as many of his own stunts as he can. He said, "I drew the line at abseiling though! I do have this fight at the end to sell where I'm perched on a tightrope with Emma Peel. Trying to be an enigmatic weirdo at 40 feet in the air is quite a challenge. Sometimes you can't do much more than hope you're breaking through with the character. If nothing else *THE AVENGERS* will prove that I can do a whole lot more than comedy."

He added, "I've worked for six weeks on a Big American Film with *THE AVENGERS* but I don't speak and I'm still expecting people to wonder who on earth I am. If people go to the rest room twenty times they'll miss me. That's my big joke with movies. If they went twice in *The Secret Agent* they'd have missed me there too. I assume Jeremiah Chechik was happy with what I was doing because he left me to my own devices. I can't say anymore about the experience than that."

Alan Jones



THE SCIE

A study of the mad



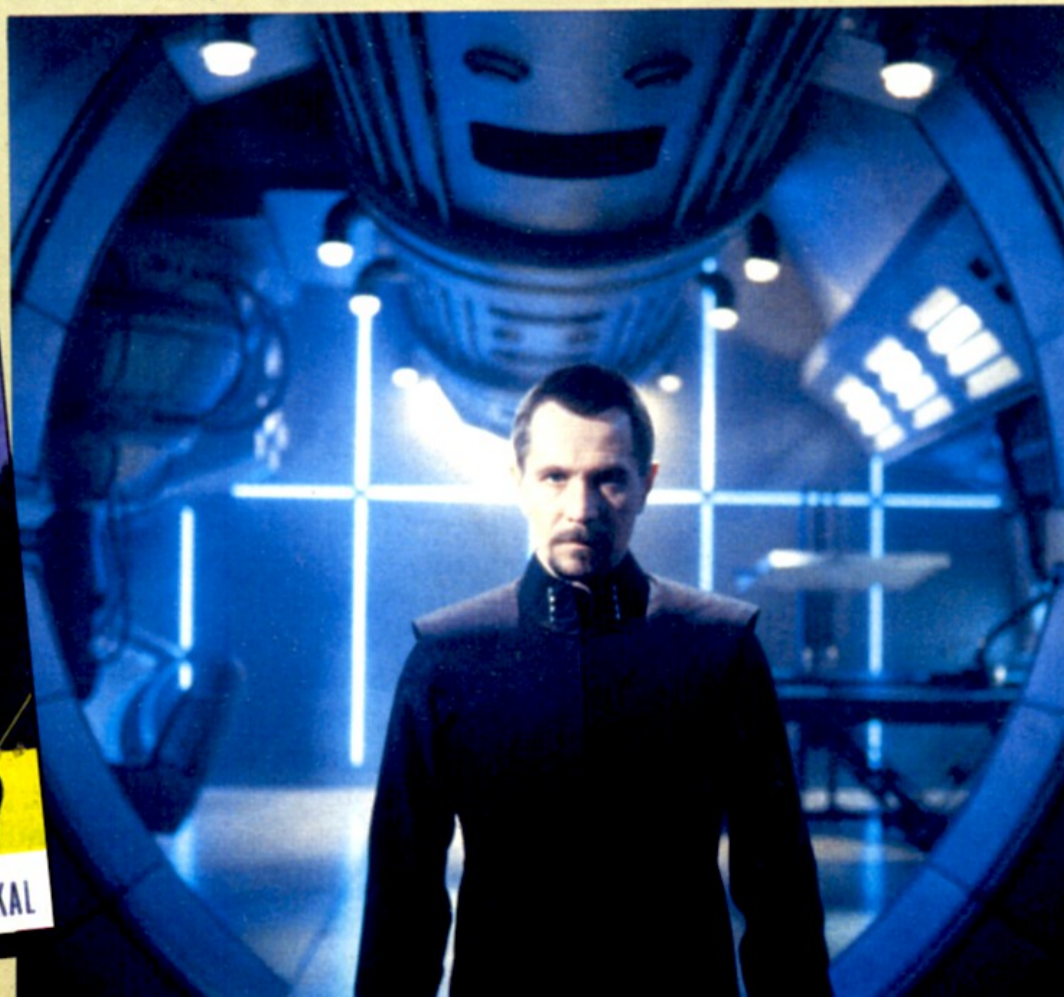
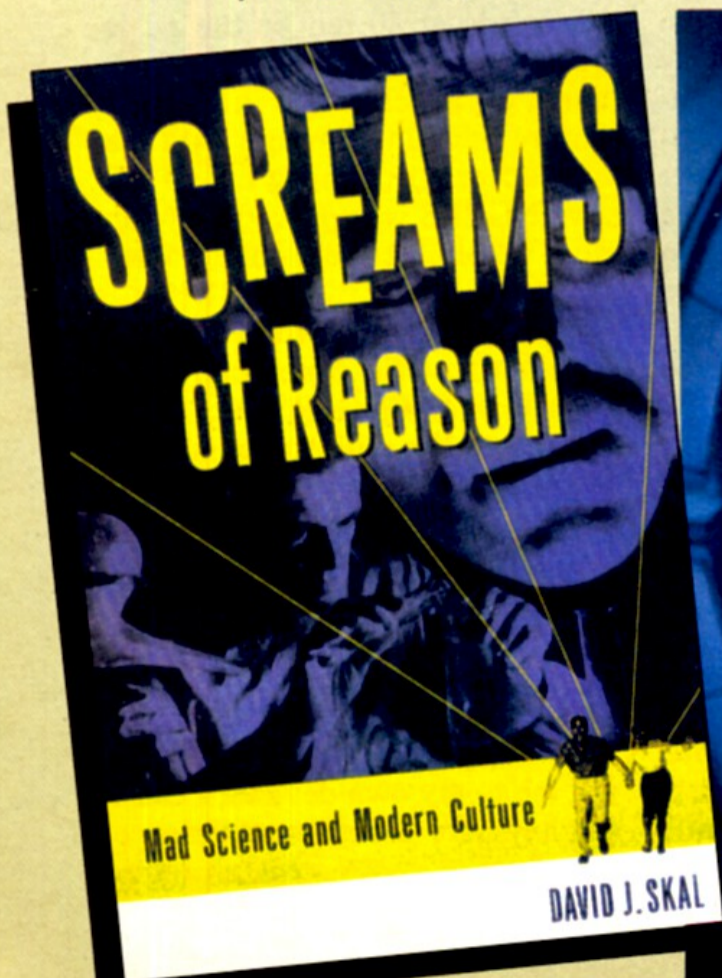
From FRANKENSTEIN to JURASSIC PARK, the mad scientist is one of our most instantly recognizable but least understood cultural icons—a master of ceremonies presiding over a sophisticated scream circus inspired by our deepest technological anxieties. He goes by many names: Victor Frankenstein, Henry Jekyll, the doctors Moreau, Phibes, Mirakle, and Strangelove. The mere mention of the words “mad scientist” conjures a vivid array of imagery: incensed villagers rising up with pitchforks and torches, ready to storm the fortress laboratory; inside the lab, whether in a converted medieval castle or on a uncharted jungle island, the scientist amid the bubbling test tubes and crackling electrical equipment. The mad scientist wears many faces. At his most malignant he looks like Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, or Vincent Price; in a less intimidating guise he is the bumbling, buck-toothed Jerry Lewis (or, later, Eddie Murphy) in THE NUTTY PROFESSOR; at his most ambiguous he looks like Albert Einstein, simultane-

ously childlike and ancient, his unruly shock of hair hinting at a possibly corresponding disorder within the skull itself, the braincase from which every mushroom cloud has risen and threatens to rise from again. (For sheer iconographic staying power, Einstein’s hair has influenced more images of demented doctors than any other visual cue.)

A prototype outsider, shunted to the sidelines of serious discourse, to the no-man’s-land of B-movies, pulp novels, and comic books, the mad scientist has served as a lightning rod for otherwise unbearable anxieties about the meaning of scientific thinking and the uses and consequences of modern technology. The mad scientist seems anarchic but often serves to support the status quo; instead of pressing us to confront the serious questions of ethics, power, and the social impact of technological advances, he too often allows us to laugh off notions that science might occasionally be the handmaiden of megalomania, greed, and sadism. And while he is often written off as the product of knee-jerk anti-intellectualism, upon closer examination, he reveals himself (mad scientists are almost always men) to be a far more complicated symbol of civilization and its split-level discontents.

This scary game of paradoxical peekaboo with mad science and mad scientists forms the core of *Screams of Reason*. It has been frequently asserted that the characteristic alienation and anomie of modern life have their roots in the mind-body schism formalized by philosopher Rene Descartes. The resulting cul-de-sac of split-brain thinking has dug what might be termed a Cartesian well of loneliness, in which the consciousness is held to be separate from, or irrelevant to, the body and the world. In other words, a classic feature of clinical schizophrenia may have become an accepted

Above: Peter Cushing—the ultimate elegant mad scientist, in CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1957)—was both dashing and dangerous as the Baron, reflecting society’s ambivalent attitudes toward science and technology. Below right: The Mad Doctor continues to haunt the screen, most recently in the form of Gary Oldman’s Dr. Smith in LOST IN SPACE. Below left: This article is excerpted from the Introduction to *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture* by David J. Skal, by permission of the publisher, W.W. Norton. © 1998 by David J. Skal.



NICE OF SCREAMS

scientist, master of modern anxiety.

way to conceptualize reality.

The controversial psychotherapist R. D. Laing (1927-1989), whom many clinical colleagues considered a species of mad doctor, turned psychiatry topsy-turvy with his heretical theories about the nature of schizophrenia, which he viewed as a retreat from an unbearable false self imposed by society and the family into a true self, unfettered in madness. In a similar vein, psychologist Louis Sass, in his provocative study *Madness and Modernism* (1992), observes that the schizophrenic, rather than represent a descent into "wild" irrationality—the classical view of insanity—may in fact display a highly exaggerated rationality. Sass notes the striking similarities between schizophrenic symptoms and the excessive self-consciousness of much modern art and literature. His thesis is an impressive one, and while Sass doesn't begin to examine popular culture, it becomes immediately clear that a relationship between madness and hyperintellectualism is also an overwhelming preoccupation of mass media science fiction. Even "serious" science fiction, closely examined, reveals itself to be frequently and deeply hostile to ideas. The s-f writer and critic Barry N. Malzberg makes the point in his book *The Engines of the Night* (1982): "Science fiction, for all its trappings, its talk of 'new horizons' and 'new approaches' and 'thinking things through from the beginning' and 'new literary excitement' is a very conservative form of literature. It is probably more conservative than westerns, mysteries or gothics, let alone that most reactionary of all literatures, pornography. Most of its writers and editors are genuinely troubled by innovative styles or concepts...they have a deep stake by the time they have

achieved any position in the field in not appearing crazy."

As an occasional writer of unapologetically "crazy" science fiction myself, I would argue (and cite Malzberg's work itself as evidence) that the genre excels at its thematic and stylistic extremes. *Screams of Reason* makes no pretense of providing an evenhanded survey of literary science fiction, a vast and unruly realm. The mad scientist was an important preoccupation of the genre during its formative century—Shelley's Frankenstein, Stevenson's Jekyll, and Wells's Moreau remain towering, glowering icons to the present day—but much of modern literary science fiction, with its relentlessly upbeat attitude toward almost anything technological, has looked upon the mad scientist as an antediluvian embarrassment.

The critic Lionel Trilling once went so far as to declare (quite prematurely, of course) the mad scientist dead. In *The Liberal Imagination* (1950) Trilling says that the "social position of science requires that it should cease," noting that any exploration of the dark, unconscious side of science and scientists is generally taboo. "But no one who has ever lived observantly among scientists will claim that they are without an unconscious or even that they are free from neurosis," Trilling writes. "How often, indeed, it is apparent that the devotion to science, if it cannot be called a neurotic manifestation, at least can be understood as going very cozily with neurotic elements in the temperament..." Since science fiction literature has itself remained cozy with the scientific establishment, it has been left to mass media science fiction to keep alive the essential mythology of the mad scientist in all

his overreaching, exultant, tragic glory.

As a precocious midwestern grade schooler, I was attracted to science fiction stories and films specifically because of their surreality, their nuttiness, their cracked-mirror reflections of a frightening cold war decade when everything seemed on the verge of explosion and extinction. I didn't make a meaningful distinction between science fiction and horror; after all, weren't they always shelved next to each other at the library and the bookstore? The uncanny, otherworldly images of Ray Bradbury, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe all merged together for me in a single escapist continuum.

My first clear memory of watching a motion picture of any genre was at the age of six in late 1958, when FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN was first broadcast on Cleveland television. As on cable television today, the films were shown repeatedly throughout the week of their premieres; I encountered the momentous doubleheader monster bill one Saturday afternoon on our hefty Magnavox console.

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN, despite its absurd plot, still contains a cartoonish distillation of the classic Apollonian-Dionysian struggle, acted out by a pair of superhuman beings, one a monster of science, one a monster of superstition. High art it ain't, but it's a clear example of how pop culture manages to deliver mighty themes to vast audiences of ordinary people in different to the higher realms of literature, music and art. In the blue collar suburb I grew up in, people who didn't have much use for *Don Giovanni* responded to *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein* proved a ser-



MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE (1932): Bela Lugosi experiments on an unfortunate Arlene Francis.

viceable substitute for *Faust*. For me, the archetypal passion of the mad scientist provided a useful construct on which to hang my own emerging creative aspirations, my adolescent emotional turmoil, and my precocious intellectual curiosity, which frequently left me feeling alienated and misunderstood.

In the backyard and basement I conducted my own experiments in monster making, building my creations not with dead tissue but with tissue paper, painstakingly applied to the faces and hands of willing or perhaps simply bored neighborhood children, who might emerge from my subterranean workshop as desiccated mummies, fantastic space aliens, brides of Frankenstein, or simply spectacularly blistered and maimed. Using well-thumbed copies of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* as my guide, with Charmin, Elmer's glue, and goeey red tempera paint as my primary tools, I brought forth countless monstrosities, apply-

By David J. Skal

ing neck bolts, third-degree burns, dangling eyeballs, and wavering antennae to the faces of wide-eyed innocents. Often I recorded the fruits of my toil on 8-millimeter movie film, or sometimes I just sent my compliant creations staggering through the wooded field that separated our neighborhood from the next, the better to startle and annoy an unsuspecting populace.

Needless to say, a lot of people thought I was nuts. Certainly I identified with mad scientists and monsters. Why not? In the overheated Cold War days of the early 1960s, an age of duck-and-cover drills and the omnipresent threat of nuclear annihilation, why not get on the good side of the guys who controlled the bombs and radiation and superhuman creations that nothing could kill? (In retrospect, those Hiroshima-style burn makeups I applied to my friends seem especially unsettling.) It's no wonder that a certain stripe of hard-core sci-fi fan often displays all the signs associated with the classic mad scientist: a profound social alienation counterbalanced by a grandiose power fantasy; the dream of "scientific mastery" barely covering a sense of vulnerability and inadequacy; the fear of being "out of control" or crazy. My personal annihilation anxieties during the Cuban missile crisis may have been particularly acute, but a fantasy identification with overreaching science can appeal to a much wider range of quieter desperations.

In a pointed essay called *The Embarrassments of Science Fiction*, Thomas M. Disch notes the perennial popularity of s-f for blue-collar audiences. Tracing the social origins of the genre, Disch observes that the "pulp magazines that arose at the turn of the century, had, as a matter of survival, to cater to the needs of the newly literate working classes. "SF is rife with fantasies of powerless individuals, of ambiguous antecedents, rising to positions of commanding importance. Often they become world saviors. The appeal of such fantasies is doubtless greater to one whose prevailing sense of himself is of being undervalued and meanly employed; who believes his es-

"How often, indeed, it is apparent that the devotion to science...can be understood as going very cozily with neurotic elements in the temperament."



The supposedly rational scientist may be tainted with bestial passions, as in DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1932) with Frederick March and Miriam Hopkins.

sential worth is hidden under the bushel of a life that somehow hasn't worked out as planned; whose most rooted conviction is that he is capable of more, though as to the nature of this unrealized potential he may not be too precise."

The crazed villains of pulp s-f are paradoxically driven by the same dreams and frustrations as the fictional heroes and their real-life readers. Like Dracula, another penny dreadful power icon for the powerless, the mad scientist is a working-class hero, something to be.

Other aspects of mad science transcend class issues and go straight for the metaphysical jugular. The problem of infusing dead matter with life, a central concern of mad scientists everywhere, is also a pointed allegory of the modern world's difficulties in reconciling the seeming contradictions of matter and mind, science and superstition. In the mechanistic

modern universe, consciousness is taboo, an embarrassing wild card inexplicable in Newtonian terms, even though it should be self-evident that the universe reveals itself only through the medium of consciousness. We know that we are not dead, that we possess subjectivity and volition, but respectable, reductionistic science tends to tell us otherwise.

The mad scientist, on the other hand, is a restless synthesizer, scuttling around his laboratory, stitching together our central schisms, digging into graves while pulling down the energy of the sky. In addition to bringing dead things to life, the mad scientist reconciles evolved consciousness with lower life-forms, another perennial preoccupation of the crazed clinicians in literature and popular culture.

Collective reveries about mad science often interact with the real world in forms beyond escape and entertainment. Take,

for example, the case of a New Mexico doctor, Jean B. Rosenbaum, who, while a freshman medical student, witnessed the untimely death of a woman from heart disease. He wrote in 1967:

I despaired at the loss of life in such a young person and was irritated at the useless procedures applied in the effort to restore her heartbeat. After brooding over her death for several weeks I decided to take an active approach—to consider the possibility of more effective ways to reactivate the stilled heart.

No sooner had the problem presented itself than Frankenstein came to mind. I had not thought of the film for many years, having been rather frightened as well as excited by it as a child. Nonetheless, there was the scene before me: the grotesque and lifeless monster high on a platform in that creepy old castle; vivid ominous lightning crackling; threatening thunder rumbling; awesome devices gathering energy and sporting electrical bolts. At last the energy made its potent way to the monster. Electricity stimulated his body and he came co life. Absurd as this drama may be to the sophisticated audiences of today, I was fascinated.

Just as Rosenbaum was about to let go of the memory, an inspiration flashed: Frankenstein showed him how a stopped human heart could be forced to beat again. The result was Rosenbaum's invention of the first cardiac pacemaker in 1951.

Other concrete manifestations of mad science are far less salutary. The twenty-five-billion-dollar boondoggle of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as Star Wars, (much to the chagrin of George Lucas, director of the movie STAR WARS, who tried unsuccessfully to enjoin the use of his film title by organizations lobbying for and against SDI) was driven by the fantastic premise of a nuclear X-ray laser, which did not exist in fact and existed only very shakily in theory. The main proponent of this dubious death ray was Dr. Edward Teller, popularly known as the father of the H-bomb. Teller detested the mad scientist collocations attending his reputa-



Right: FRANKENSTEIN (1931, with Colin Clive) is Faust for a mass audience. Left: Basil Rathbone played SON OF FRANKENSTEIN (1939), with Bela Lugosi as Igor, and Boris Karloff as the monster.

democratic computer scientist who told us joyfully how electronic data bases piped into homes through fiber-optic cables are about to put newspapers out of business. He did not care what this triumph of technological progress would do to the poor citizen who cannot afford fiber optics and would still like to read a newspaper.

It has become something of an argumentative cliché (and a winning one, as the steamrollering progress of the genetic engineering industry demonstrates) for scientists to insist on a clear line of demarcation between pure science and its technological applications. This strikes me as a bit disingenuous and immediately calls to mind the old Tom Lehrer song: "Once the rockets go up/ Who cares where they come down?/ That's not my department/ Says Wernher von Braun." Few, if any, modern scientists work in a technological vacuum; even "pure research" in educational settings is funded by somebody, and that somebody is likely to be industry or the military. I will therefore avoid clumsy constructions like "mad science and/or technology" (the term "mad technologist," after all, has never exactly taken hold). Despite a regrettable tendency for many science professionals to affect the atti-



tudes of a privileged, priestly caste, scientists inhabit the same society as the rest of us and are motivated by the same range of drives, ambitions, and weaknesses as other people. Our prevalent, hyperbolic images of the madly overreaching scientist may be a half-conscious balloon-popping response to the perception—correct or not—that too much of modern life is controlled by arrogant and irresponsible science-related structures and systems.

This book is not a critique of science per se, although I am disturbed by scientism, or science transmuted into a self-congratulatory, quasi-religious belief system from its more proper role as a systematic means of understanding the physical world. Some of the recent claims about artificial intelligence, virtual reality and cyborgs strike me as almost mad, truly crackpot and delusional. (I deal with them at some length in my last chapter, "Vile Bodies.") But my primary interest here is not the machinations of science itself but the fascinating life and times of its dark doppelgänger, the mad scientist, in all his overreaching glory. *Screams of Reason* itself may be a slightly crazed experiment, but what better way to explore our multi-level cultural waltz with the maniac in the lab coat: where he's been leading us, what he's trying to tell us, and why he never really goes away. □

David J. Skal is the author of *V is for Vampire* and *Dark Carnival*, which were previously excerpted in *Cinefantastique*.

tion and, according to some observers, saw the peacemaking potential of a nuclear umbrella in space as a way to salvage his good name, which was on shaky ground in the age of the growing anti-nuclear movement, Three Mile Island, and Chernobyl. But the public and its legislative representatives, conditioned by decades of science fiction imagery and increasingly compelling special effects technology, were willing to accept the premise. Why not? We had already seen it a thousand times before.

Our relationship to science and technology is complex and increasingly embattled. A puritanical suspicion of the intellect is still deeply ingrained in the American character; ideas, like sex (not to mention ideas about sex), are still regarded in many quarters as a slippery slope to hell. Science and technology bashing has been increasingly the subject of popular books, with authors taking both the offense and the defense. Although our cultural and economic futures are highly dependent on scientific training and technological innovation, we maintain a maddening Jekyll-and-Hyde hypocrisy in the basic areas of educational funding, teachers' salaries, etc. Specialized knowledge, scientific and otherwise, is routinely stifled and belittled, sometimes—as even scientists will occasionally admit—with a certain amount of justification.

In a 1993 essay, Princeton University scientist Freeman J. Dyson candidly discusses the popular backlash against science, which he predicts will be-

come increasingly bitter as long as economic inequities persist. While refusing to blame science alone for the fraying of the social and economic fabric, Dyson holds that scientists are "more responsible than most of us are willing to admit."

We are responsible for the heavy preponderance of toys for the rich over necessities for the poor in the output of our laboratories. We have allowed government and university laboratories to become a welfare program for the middle class while the technical products of our discoveries take away jobs from the poor. We have helped to bring about a widening split between the technically competent and computer-owning rich and the computerless and technically illiterate poor... I recently listened to a distinguished aca-

Another mad doctor whose work blurs the line between human and animal is Dr. Moreau, best embodied by Charles Laughton in ISLAND OF LOST SOULS.



THE SPIRIT OF MICKEY

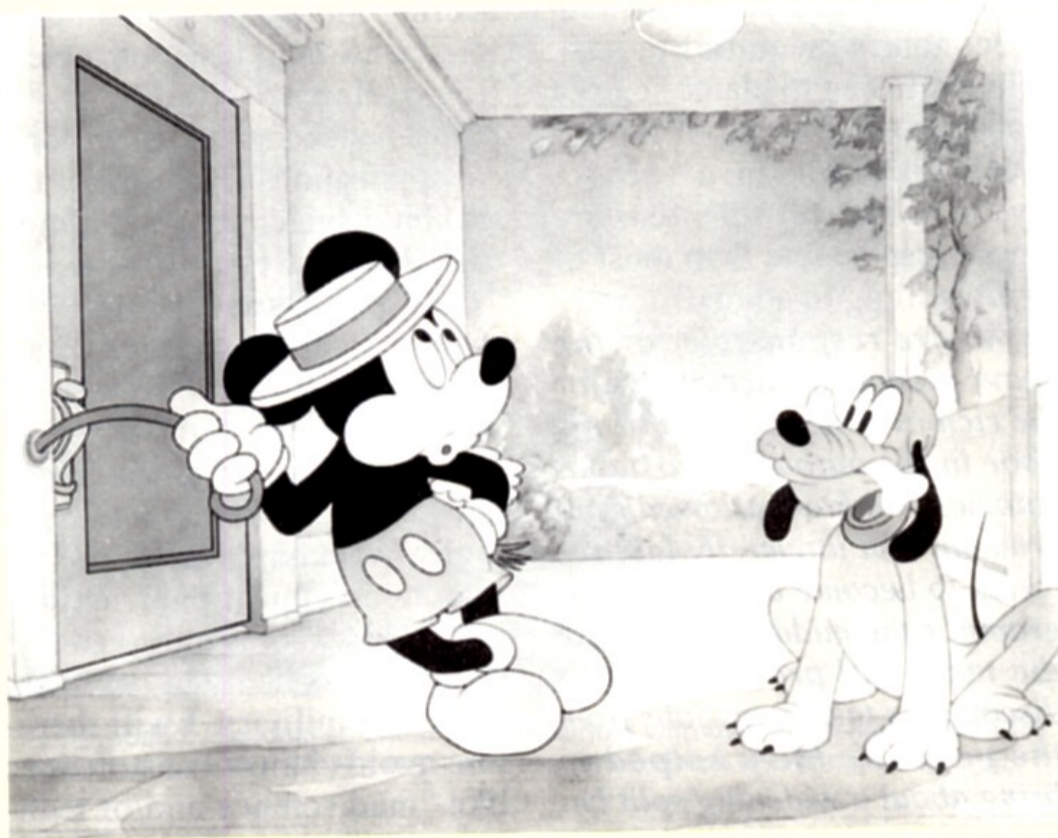
Disney marks the 70th anniversary of their biggest star with a video anthology.

By Dan Scapperotti

The genesis of the world's most famous animated character and corporate logo has been recounted many times: Walt Disney, returning from a disastrous business trip to New York, where clawing corporate hands at Universal Pictures had snatched his most famous creation at the time, Oswald the Rabbit, away from him. The gloomy train journey home and the creation of Mortimer Mouse—yes, Mortimer. Fortunately Disney's wife was there to re-christen the new character Mickey. Oswald, of course, faded to a footnote in animation history while Mickey enjoys a worldwide popularity now seventy years later.

On November 30th, Mickey will celebrate 70 years in the business, and the video division of the studio that gave him birth intends to mark the milestone with a new tape compilation of the Mouse's cartoons, *THE SPIRIT OF MICKEY*. The Director of Programming and Product Development for the division, Stan Deneroff, has been searching the vaults for a suitable collection. A self-admitted Disneyphile, Deneroff came up with eleven short subjects. "We're going to present Mickey and his gang, to give an overview through the years that represent the best of Mickey," said Deneroff. "It shows him in various guises and various acting abilities. It will be a sampling of what Mickey was like over the years."

Deneroff has chosen to ignore such new vehicles as "The



The new compilation of short subjects shows off Mickey and his various co-stars, including Pluto, seen here in *MICKEY'S SURPRISE PARTY*.

Prince and the Pauper" and "The Runaway Brain." Instead his choice of titles ends in 1948 with "Mickey and the Seal." Although the titles and end cards will be missing from each cartoon, the content itself will be complete, and new material will be inserted between each short.

"We will be creating custom interstitials with rotoscoped elements of Mickey, Donald, Goofy, and Minnie, which we're compositing against new backgrounds to set up each of the cartoons," Deneroff said. "We're not presenting the cartoons in any kind of chronological order. We decided it was better to go for what played best and keep two Mickey-and-Pluto cartoons from being back to back. We went more for playability than chronology."

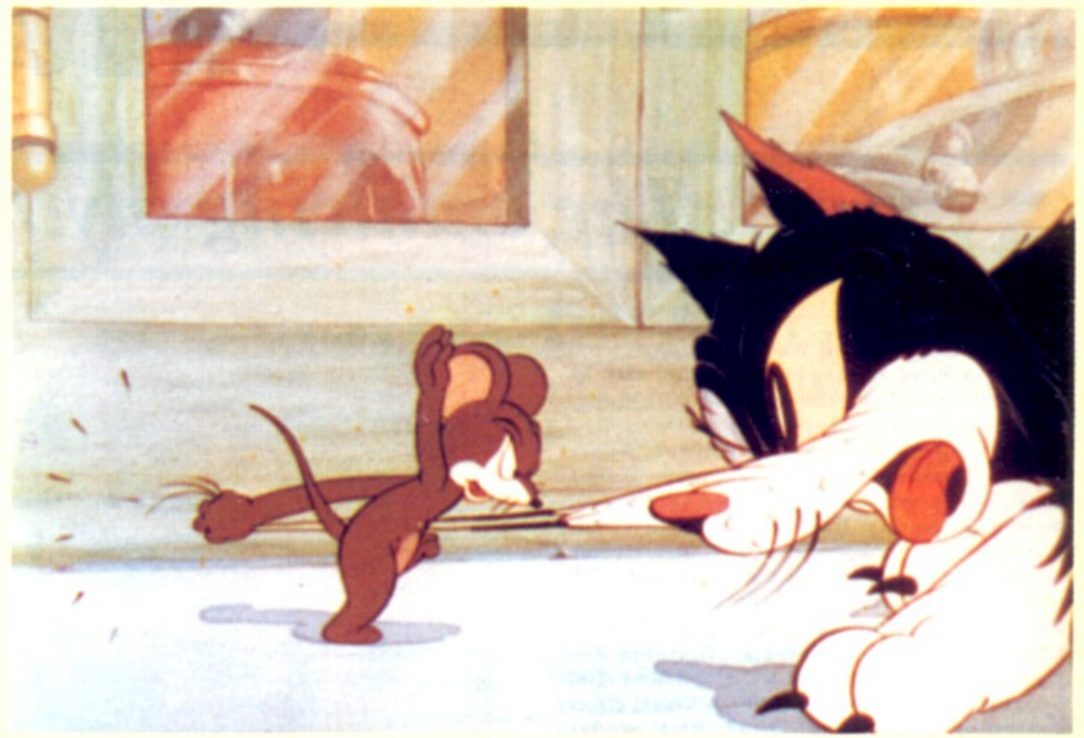
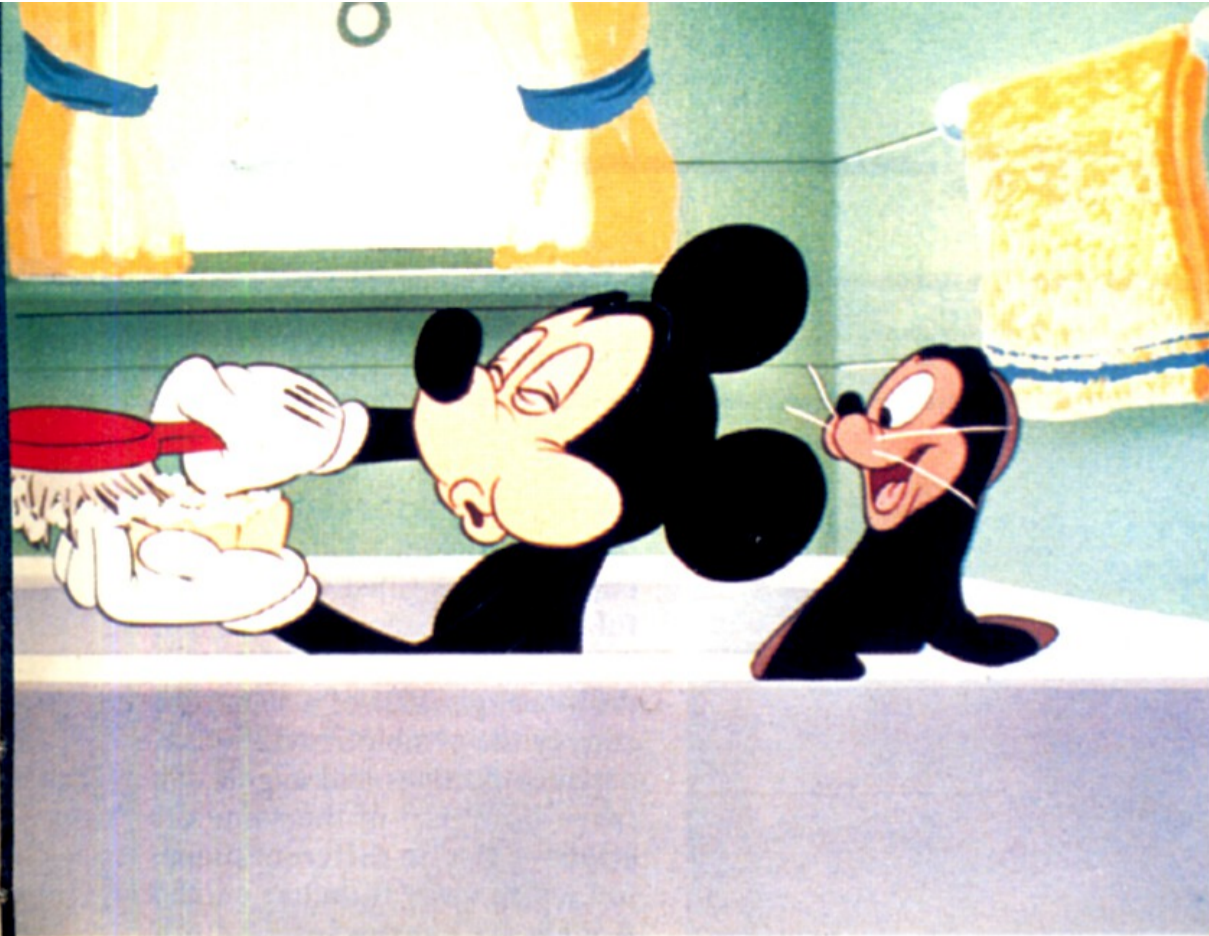
Though Mickey's first theatrical appearance in "Steam-

boat Willie" (1928), the first animated short with sound, will be included, it comes at the end of the new tape. "The Band Concert," Mickey's first color cartoon in 1935 was also selected. "We sort of came up with an interesting approach in that we found an old clip of Mickey, who's more present-day looking, looking at a Mickey who is black-and-white with rubbery legs and is a more rat-like Mickey. The Mickey on the left, the black-and-white one, is dancing, and the other one says to him 'Are you the original Mickey Mouse?' and he just goes 'Squeak!' We were able to get Walt Disney's presence in there, too. We do a dissolve into Walt Disney talking about when he first met Mickey, and Mickey was a starving young artist. That segues into 'Steamboat Willie.' This is really creating a

special treatment for our biggest star."

While wading through the dozens of cartoons and evaluating which to include on the tape, Deneroff wanted to include new material. "As part of our evaluation, we have included two cartoons which have not previously been released on video. A big factor was trying to find something new that hadn't already found its way into peoples homes. Unfortunately, most of the Mickey Mouse cartoons, except for the b&w ones, have at some point or another been released on home video. It was just a question of selecting the ones that weren't over exposed and finding ones that have never been used. We came up with two that had never been released on video before, 'Orphans Picnic' [1936] and 'Mickey's Surprise Party.'" Released in 1939, "Mickey's Surprise Party" is not to be confused with "Mickey's Birthday Party" three years later. In the first film, the bulk of the action falls to Minnie Mouse, who's baking cookies in the kitchen. Thanks to the antics of her dog, Fifi, popcorn kernels fall into the dough with wild results.

"We wanted to give a sampling of Mickey in various guises," Deneroff explained. "For example, historically we included 'The Band Concert' because that is Mickey's first color cartoon. Then we picked something like 1936's 'Thru the Mirror,' which I love because he does this whole Fred Astaire imitation. I think it's one of the most astounding things that's ever been animated by the stu-



Above: in **THE WORM TURNS**, a mouse turns the tables on a cat, thanks to a potion devised by Mickey. Left: **MICKEY AND THE SEAL**, the tape's latest cartoon.

dio, especially when you pay attention to things like the reflections in the cartoon and the amount of detail work that went into that. We have all these dancing cards with numbers on them like the three of hearts and the six of diamonds and they're all shown in reflection at the same time. It's quite astounding, and Mickey shows himself to be a suave dancer in this. It's just totally charming in that regard. It's a very free adaptation of the *Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass*. But I think it really captures that sort of wacky world better than any other version of Alice, even though it's not a strict literal telling of the story, just using it as a guide post."

The ninth Academy Award winner for the studio, the 1941 short, "Lend A Paw," features Mickey and Pluto with the flopped dog being split by his good and evil sides over jealousy at Mickey's attention to a kitten. Pluto is also featured in another cartoon on the tape, "Canine Caddy" (1941). "We

wanted to give a complete profile of the character and give his pals a bit of the spotlight in these cartoons," said Deneroff. "We didn't want to focus only on Mickey. Mickey had to have a presence in each of the cartoons, but in some of them the real feature is on Pluto, like in 'Lend A Paw,' and the same with 'Orphans Picnic.' Mickey's there, and Pluto's there, but the focus of attention seems to be on Donald Duck. In 'Mickey's Surprise Party,' we spend a lot of time with Minnie. We didn't want to call it Mickey and His Gang, but we felt we wanted to include all his costars with him. Co-stars were important in his shorts. Except for one called 'Just Mickey' (1930) I can't think of one that his co-stars don't appear in. We give a sampling of him in the span from 1928 to 1948."

The only known footage to exist of Walt Disney recording the voice of Mickey Mouse was for the cartoon "Mr. Mouse Takes A Trip." The studio featured the footage as part of the

'Making of Fun and Fancy Free' on the recent video release of the 1947 feature. The film shows Disney with actor Billy Bletcher who does the voice of Pete, the conductor who harasses Mickey while the Mouse tries to keep Pluto hidden on the train.

As a kind of animated Three Stooges, Mickey, Donald Duck and Goofy teamed up for a series of hilarious cartoons including "Clock Cleaners," "The Whalers," and "Moving Day." These trio adventures are represented by the 1938 short, "Mickey's Trailer." "I actually love that cartoon," said Deneroff. "I think 'Mickey's Trailer' is just one of the most fun of them all. It featured them interacting very cleverly and we also have their solo moments alone to give them each a spotlight. It's a very funny cartoon which holds up today."

Chronologically, the last Mickey Mouse cartoon included on the tape is "Mickey and the Seal." "That is also a fun cartoon especially the segments

in the bath tub with the seal and Mickey not knowing that the seal is in there and having his back scrubbed for him. It's all such cute stuff."

Rounding out the tape is "The Worm Turns" from 1937. Mickey splashes together a strange potion that gives strength and courage to whatever he sprays. Suddenly a fly, a mouse, and a cat are able to turn on their aggressors. Even Pluto gets his chance to do a little tormenting of his arch enemy, Pete the dog catcher.

The new material created especially for the tape includes a theme song, "Hey, Mickey," which will be sung over the opening montage of films clips. "There will be an introduction, and each of the cartoons will be set up by some interstitial feature," said Deneroff. "Interstitial guests will include Mickey, the host, Minnie, Donald, Goofy, Pluto, Daisy, Ludwig Von Drake and even Goofy's son Max. We have all these people showing up to say their words about Mickey." □

THE SPIRIT OF MICKEY shows off the famous mouse in a variety of guises and acting styles, as seen in eleven short subjects that range from 1928 to 1948.



The enduring myth of heaven, revisited

CITY OF ANGELS

A Warner Bros. release in association with Regency Pictures of an Atlas Entertainment production. Produced by: Charles Roven, Dawn Steel. Executive producers: Arnon Milchan, Robert Cavallo, Charles Newirth; Co-producers: Douglas Segal, Kelley Smith-Wait; Directed by: Brad Silberling; Screenplay: Dana Stevens, based on Wim Wenders' film "Wings of Desire." Camera (Technicolor, Panavision widescreen): John Seale; Editor: Lynzee Klingman; Music: Gabriel Yared; Production designer: Lilly Kilvert; Art director: John O. Warnke; Set decorator: Gretchen Rau; Costume designer: Shay Cunliffe; Sound (Dolby/DTS/SDDS): David MacMillan; Visual effects supervisor: John Nelson; Visual effects producers: Jeff Levine, Alan G. Glazer; Assistant director: Michele Panelli-Venetis; Casting: David Rubin. Rating: MPAA PG-13. Running time: 117 min.

Seth.....	Nicolas Cage
Maggie.....	Meg Ryan
Cassiel.....	Andre Braugher
Messinger.....	Dennis Franz
Jordan.....	Colm Feore
Anne.....	Robin Bartlett
Teresa.....	Joanna Merlin
Susan.....	Sarah Dampf

by Anthony P. Montesano

"How do you explain it...the enduring myth of Heaven?"

—CITY OF ANGELS

The 1990s have seen a renewed fascination with angels and all things spiritual. A 1996 Gallup poll reported that nearly three out of four people in the country believe in angels. References to these heavenly creatures continue to appear with great frequency in pop song lyrics. Magazines (*Angels on Earth*) and speciality stores (Calling All Angels) have been founded to focus exclusively on angels. On television, *TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL* (the '90s answer to the '80s *HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN*) has risen to the top ten in the ratings. Books and documentaries on



Nicolas Cage and Meg Ryan star in the latest exploration of angel mythology *CITY OF ANGELS*, a loose remake of Wim Wenders' *WINGS OF DESIRE*.

angels are everywhere.

Of course, Hollywood responded to this increased interest with an outpouring of films on the subject: *THE CROW* (and its sequel), *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*, *MICHAEL, HEARTS & SOULS*, *ANGELS IN THE OUTFIELD*, *FALLEN*, and *THE PROPHECY* are just a few of the films that have recently explored angel mythology. This year, *CITY OF ANGELS* opened on Good Friday and stayed at number one at the boxoffice for two weeks. A loose remake of Wim Wenders 1988 German film *WINGS OF DESIRE*, it conforms to many of the "accepted rules" regarding angels on screen: they can only be seen when they want to be

seen; children have no problem seeing them; they travel at the speed of thought; they have never been mortal; and they often long for the joys of human life.

Despite the fact that these inhabitants of Heaven are closer to God, feel no pain and appreciate aspects of nature humans could never begin to understand, it seems that angels want to experience physical life. Could this be the arrogance of human screenwriters postulating such notions? We only need examine the films themselves to figure this out. Why would creatures of the light want so badly to be human? One frequent explanation is their desire to fall in love. But, as evidenced by Seth in *CITY OF ANGELS*, angels need not be human to fall in love. In fact, they are in a state of complete love all of the time. What then? The need to physically consummate that love? Apparently so. A very "human" desire.

Seth (appealingly played by Nicholas Cage, in his best role since winning the Oscar for *LEAVING LAS VEGAS*) falls in love with Maggie (Meg Ryan), a heart surgeon suffering a crisis of confidence after losing a patient on her operating table. After consulting a fellow angel (Andre Braugher), Seth decides to "show" himself to Maggie, and the two quickly form a bond. Maggie slowly begins to question her beliefs and her personal-sexual relationship with a fellow heart sur-

geon. Former angel-turned human (Dennis Franz) is thrown in the mix as a romantic catalyst. Early on, the film is filled with wonderful moments (a convenience store robbery stands out) which, with the visual panache of a silent film, convey the symbiotic relationship between humans and angels. The two—both part of the same creation—exist on different planes, just a step away from one another. Angels are everywhere, helping humans where they can, acting as guides for those about the pass on to the other side. Understated visuals (the film avoids angel wings in favor of long black trench coats, for example) create a soothing aura throughout. And, although the sweeping camera movements provide the audience with an angel's point-of-view of their various activities throughout the day (you'll never look at the Hollywood sign the same way again), the film, for the most part, under-utilizes its Los Angeles setting, returning time and again to the same locations, primarily a library and a small strip of beach (shot from the same angle each time). While the repetition may have been intentional to underscore the assigned "beats" of these angels, the effect is limiting.

The central relationship between Cage and Ryan never generates an adequate level of passion to make us believe Seth would give up an eternity of bliss for a human lifetime with Maggie. Ryan doesn't begin to approach the same level of complexity she brought to her finest moment on

The angel Seth (Cage) appears to Ryan's distraught surgeon, Maggie, who is facing a crisis of doubt after losing a patient on the operating table.



Seth gets some pointers from a previous angel who fell to Earth.





Observed by other angels, a smitten Seth moves through the library in search of Meg Ryan's character.

screen: the character of Sally Albright in *WHEN HARRY MET SALLY...* That's not to say the film is without genuine moments. The conversations between Seth and Maggie are, in fact, quite provoking. It's just that we've seen much of this before. The ending—although admirably avoiding recent Hollywood convention—falls prey to even worse levels of melodramatic contrivance, and the emotion it should elicit is dampened by the lack of passion preceding it. Director Brad Silberling previously explored similar, albeit more

Dennis Franz plays the ex-angel—Peter Falk's role in the original.



cartoonish, territory in *CASPER*. His work here, though polished and strangely comforting to watch, does little to expand the boundaries of angels on screen.

The 1990s are by no means the only era to explore the myth of angels on screen, but the proliferation in this decade is quite notable. And the range with which this topic is examined has provided a broad canvas on which to paint these Heaven-sent messengers and engender them with our own human needs. Interestingly, angels on screen fall into two categories: those that were never human (*MICHAEL, THE PROPHECY, CITY OF ANGELS*) and those who have passed on and are "earning their wings" (*HEARTS & SOULS, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, THE CROW, GHOST*).

Those who fall into the first category drive the dramatic course of films like *CITY OF ANGELS*, which portray these creatures as benevolent guides, guardians or messengers. Some films, however, have treated them as violent and dangerous (*THE PROPHECY, FALLEN, THE CROW*), and at least one film advanced the notion of them as clueless beautiful beings (*DATE WITH AN ANGEL*). Regardless of the emphasis, the overwhelming theme is the same. Angels act as a buffer between us

and Heaven—between us and God. And almost universally, these films suggest that while the angels are on a higher plain than we are, they are just as unsure of God's thinking as humans are. Sure, they understand the afterlife better, but they are still at a loss to explain "why" someone is going to die, for example. With a deeper understanding of the balance between life and afterlife, they simply accept it better.

CITY OF ANGELS provides a supernatural help network, on call 24 hours a day to assist humans.

Comparing notes on their observations of humanity, Seth and another angel (Andre Braugher) sit atop a freeway sign in an early, amusing scene.



Angels are always there when we need them. They're nice to have around; they are our friends. Although they may want to be like us, they don't hate us (as in *THE PROPHECY*). And in the end, they have the same level of free will as we do to make a decision to stay an angel or to "fall" and become a human. However, when a young girl dies early on, it's clear that it can't work the other way around: she can't become an angel simply because she died.

In other films, the line between ghost and angel is not so clear. Certainly, the title character in *GHOST* (Patrick Swayze) acts as a guardian angel for the lover (Demi Moore) he left behind, although he is basically powerless to help her. The same holds true for the spirits in *HEARTS & SOULS*. Killed in a bus accident at the beginning of the film, they are immediately assigned the role of guardian angels for the character played by Robert Downey, Jr. But are they angels or ghosts? In *THE CROW*, a mortal returns as an avenging angel to bring justice to his and his girlfriend's murder. Perhaps the granddaddy of this type of angel film is *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. Already steeped in a Christmas Eve setting (Christmas, more than any other holiday, evokes the images of angels), the film's angel Clarence, sent to help George Bailey (James Stewart), is actually a former mortal trying to earn his wings. Unless you've lived in a cave for the last 50 years you already know that "every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings."

The sinister side of angels has also made for interesting characterizations on screen. In Martin

continued on page 61

Avoids the usual disaster film cliches

DEEP IMPACT

A Paramount release of a Paramount and Dreamworks presentation of a Zanuck/Brown production. Produced by Rickard D. Zanuck, David Brown. Executive Producers: Steven Spielberg, Joan Bradshaw, Walter Parkes. Director: Mimi Leder. Editor: David Rosenbloom. Director of photography: Dietrich Lohman. Production designer: Leslie Diley. Art Directors: Gary Kosko, Thomas Valentine, Dennis Bradford, Andrew Neskornny. Music: James Horner. Sound: Mark Hopkins McNabb. Special visual effects: Industrial Light & Magic. Screenplay by Michael Tolkin, Bruce Joel Rubin. 5/98, 120 mins, Rated PG-13.

Spurgeon Tanner.....	Robert Duvall
Jenny Lerner.....	Tea Leoni
Leo Biederman.....	Elijah Wood
Robin Lerner.....	Vanessa Redgrave
President Seck.....	Morgan Freeman
Jason Lerner.....	Maximillian Schell

by Alan Jones

This loose remake of George Pal's 1951 *WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE* has a very deep impact on both the eyes and the heart. Rather than the tepid disaster movie that director Mimi Leder's last outing (*THE PEACEMAKER*) led us to expect, *DEEP IMPACT* eschews all *TOWERING INFERNO* cliches, spits them out, and reinvents the genre in purely human terms. Clearly spurred on by the absorbing screenplay from Michael Tolkin (*THE RAPTURE*) and Bruce Joel Rubin (*GHOST*), Leder places their skilled, compelling, and thought-provoking scenario at center stage, then stands back and lets all the emotional and visual fireworks emanate from the rock solid core.

A huge comet is on a collision course with Earth, threatening all life on our planet if a risky space mission, led by Spurgeon Tanner (Duvall), doesn't explode the threat with nuclear warheads. A backup plan consists of placing scientists, doctors, and academics in underground "Arks" in the



In the last five minutes of *DEEP IMPACT*, the destruction promised in the film's trailer finally arrives—too little, too late.

desert, along with a random selection of ordinary citizens chosen by lottery. Obviously, the news has a cataclysmic effect on the global population, and it's one of the best strands of the movie. Many films evoke the "What if?" question, yet few really take time to address the incumbent serious issues. Not so here. The grim reality of the situation is beautifully presented.

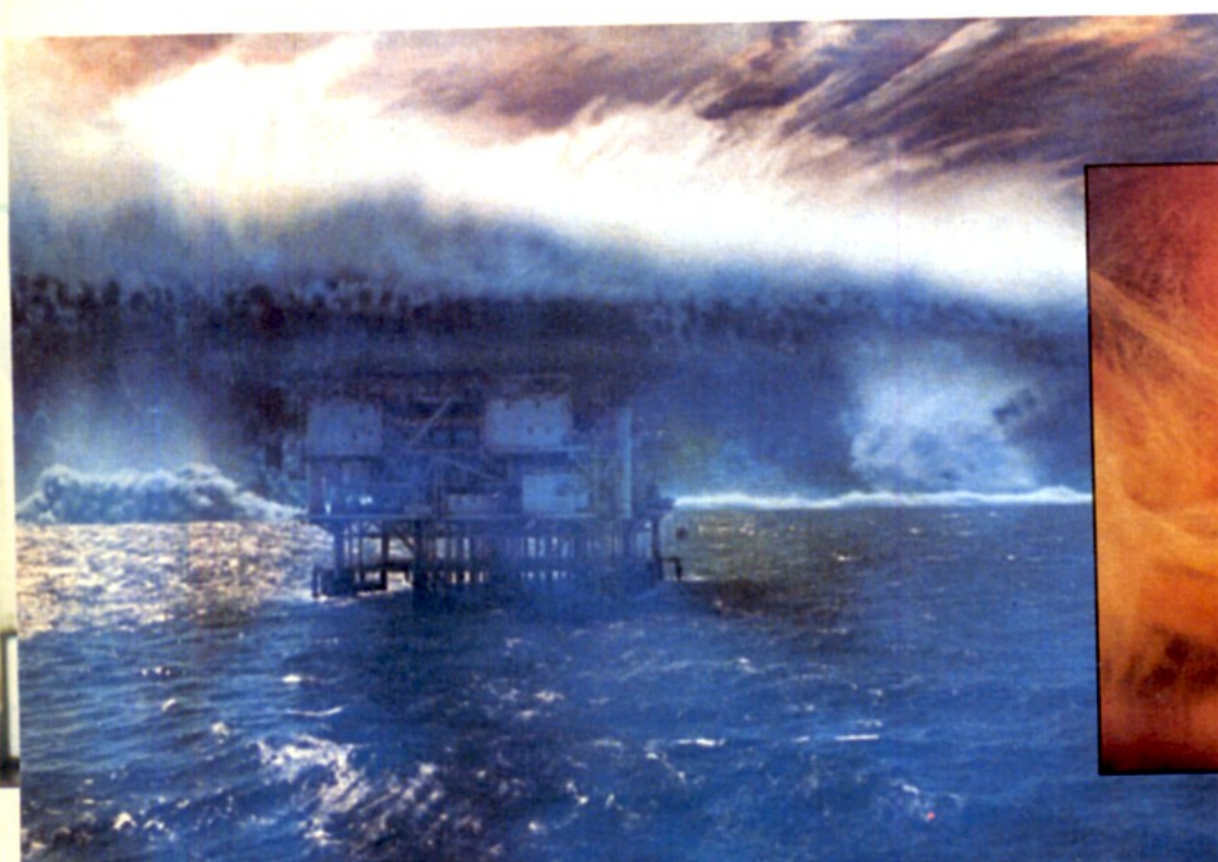
How the characters cope with noble resignation, panic, and fate in the light of impending extinction are the focal points of this very mortal disaster movie, which—astonishingly—leaves most of its star cast dead.

Chock full of surprise twists and spectacular turns, *DEEP IMPACT* has a chilling gravity that impresses most. Leder doesn't

short-change the fantasy elements: she delivers an epic trail of climactic destruction, tidal waves, Manhattan flattening, and—the recurring image of modern science fiction—the White House smoldering in ruins. Yet it's the poetic way the story is allowed to unfold, the complexity of the characters, and the total believability of the situations that give the movie its edgy resonance. Rarely has a "disaster movie" had such an unadulterated credible tone or a sweeping panorama of pathos and passion.

Three tremendous performances punch the human dimensions across forcefully. Duvall and Freeman are so commanding in their roles that they practically obliterate everyone else off the screen. However, it's Tea Leoni (Mrs. David Duchovny) who grabs all the attention and doesn't let go as she becomes the prime TV news anchor explaining the spine-tingling information, then leaves a long-lasting impression by forgoing her Ark placement to reconcile with her estranged father. *ARMAGEDDON* will have to be really good to top this. □

Father and daughter reconciliation: Maximillian Schell and Tea Leoni put aside their differences to face the approaching tidal wave together.



ART HOUSE

By Dan Persons

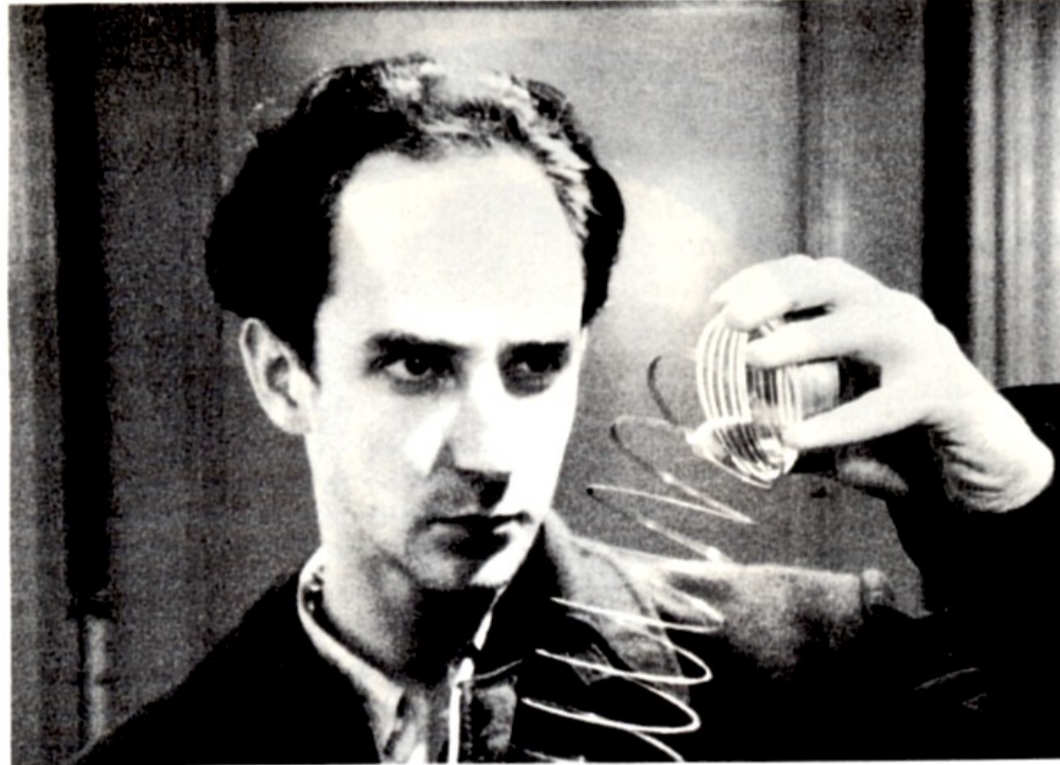
PI & THE BUTCHER BOY

Two slices of thoughtful fantasy fare.

If ever there was a poster boy for the too-brilliant, it would be Maximillian Cohen. Formidable mathematician and neurotic recluse, Max (Sean Gullette) is already well on the road to certifiability at the beginning of π , (Live Entertainment, 7/98, 85 mins), Darren Aronofsky's gritty collision of mathematic theory and New York paranoia. No question about it, Max clearly is courting his own doom: embracing the notion that there is a formula for every phenomenon in nature, he starts out determined to predict the ebbs and flows of the stock market. Instead, the patchwork assemblage of electronics he's constructed to serve as a computer prematurely expires, in its death throes gracing Max with a number that may or may not be the mathematical code for the true name of God. Set upon by thug-like stock brokers and no-less-thuggish scholars of the Kabbalah, tortured by random seizures that seem nature's ironic comment on the man's obsession with dispelling the mysteries of chaos, Max starts off the film in a haze of hubris and neuroticism, but by the end is significantly humbled in the face of forces far beyond the human ken.

Aronofsky shows a little film-geek-like hubris himself. The reclusive Cohen—holed up in a crumbling, Chinatown apartment whose major furnishing is that tinker-toy super-computer—seems very much the creation of someone who's had to make do while seek-

Budding sociopath Francie (Eamonn Owens) embodies earthbound horror in Neil Jordan's THE BUTCHER BOY.



In π (pronounced *Pi*), mathematical genius Maximillian Cohen (Sean Gullette) finds his scientific studies leading to apparently mystical conclusions.

ing his place amongst the likes of Woody Allen and Brian DePalma. Meanwhile, the mathematician's world-view is not unlike that of someone who's spent too many nights deconstructing the montage patterns of *VIDEODROME* when he should have been out getting drunk with friends. (He sets aside time every week to bait his old professor over a Go board and can barely distinguish between the well-shod, oily-cordial brokers and the black-clad, aggressively amicable Hasidim.)

Aronofsky films this comedy of urban grief in grainy black and white—the film format for all genuine, New York stories (you see, Woody, you were right)—and capitalizes on Max's revulsion of intimacy with looming, personal-space violating close-ups of the scientist's tormentors. With its vision of mathematicians courting disaster through the intricacies of their practice, π as a story wouldn't have seemed out-of-place in the pages of *Asimov's*. As a film, it's a skewed, perversely enjoyable vision of New York as a petrie dish of chaos theory—a science-fiction narrative with more intellectual weight than the customary super-model/alien-breeding-program offerings that the big-studios dish up.

The monster in Neil Jordan's *BUTCHER BOY* (Geffen, 4/98, 110 mins, R) is Francie (Eamonn Owens), a local youth growing up in a small Irish village at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That

Francie is his own kind of atomic peril—a raw power whose destructive potential can just barely be gauged—only gradually comes to us; it's over time that we realize we're seeing the world through the boy's eyes, and his vision—the skewed but near-credible perception of the borderline sociopath—is leading him down a road that can only end in doom. Director Jordan makes Francie's an antic damnation—Stephen Rea, who also plays the boy's besotted father, delivers the black-comic narration with a bitter lilt, and Francie's delusions have the boy courted by a chorus-line of sycophantic “bogmen” in reform school and visited by a foul-mouthed Virgin Mary (Sinead O'Connor—a casting choice that may have been too witty for its own good) at night. But it's this beguilement that leads to the film's deepest horror: the audience laughs, and clearly Jordan means it to, but the laughter stems from the sublimated cruelty of the boy, and one has to wonder whether it's a good thing to be asked to identify so closely with this brilliant little beast (sadly, some members of my audience kept on laughing long after it was appropriate). The irony is that all the big-studio dollars in the world couldn't help Jordan pin *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*, but *BUTCHER BOY* reveals a facility with earth-bound horror far beyond what he achieved with the preternatural Louis and Lestat. □

FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

LAWN DOGS

Director: John Duigan. Writer: Naomi Wallace. Strand Releasing, 5/98. 101mins. With: Sam Rockwell, Kathleen Quinlan, Mischa Barton.

Much like last year's Oscar-nominee *THE SWEET HEREAFTER*, John Duigan's new film weaves a fairy tale subtext into an otherwise realistic story by having a young girl read passages in voiceover at appropriate points. The difference is that *LAWN DOGS* ultimately feels the need to pay off on this setup, with a brief moment of fantasy just before the final fadeout.

Ten-year-old Devon (Mischa Barton) has just moved into Camelot Gardens, a gated community where everything is supposed to be perfect, but she knows the surface is just an illusion, having spotted her mother (Quinlan) having an affair with a local youth. Looking for something outside this sterile environment, Devon becomes fascinated by Trent (Sam Rockwell), who mows lawns in the affluent suburb but is far too poor to live there himself. Devon imagines herself, like the character in her favorite fairy tale, going outside the walls of the castle and into a scary forest haunted by the evil witch Baba Yaga. Trent, on the other hand, realizes that nothing good can come from this unwanted friendship, which is sure to be resented by Devon's parents.

What ensues is a delightful, well-drawn study of two characters from opposite sides of the tracks who gradually learn they have more than a few things in common (including, most obviously, both having almost died, Trent from a gunshot, Devon from heart surgery). The script by Naomi Wallace is rich with emotions and avoids condescending to its lead character, resulting in a film about a ten-year-old that is not really a children's film (although one hopes parents wouldn't be scared off from bringing older children). Duigan, who fell out of favor with critics when he stopped making whimsical coming-of-age films like *THE YEAR MY VOICE BROKE* and *FLIRTING* in favor of adult subjects like *WIDE SAR-GASSO SEA* and *SIRENS*, moves somewhat back in his old direction, while still maintaining an adult viewpoint on the material. (The R-rating is the result of Trent's relationship with one of the adult women from Camelot, who doesn't mind bicycling out to his trailer for a little sex now and then, but blanches upon encountering him in public where her friends might see.)

When the fantasy element briefly emerges, it is certainly not unexpected, given all that's preceded, but it's not as overwhelming and uplifting as obviously intended; it works okay, but it lacks the profound dramatic impact of the similar last minute intrusion of the fantastic in *BREAKING THE WAVES*.

●●● Steve Biodrowski



BORDERLAND

By Anthony P. Montesano

After collecting dust on the studio shelf for over a year, there was a great deal of anticipation for the release of **NIGHTWATCH** (4/98, Dimension Films, 101 mins, R). And initially, the reaction is "Wow, this was worth the wait!" Simply put, the opening sequences of the film are among the finest moments in the history of the genre. Period. With effective storytelling and knowing camera movements, we are informed, in short order of the following: a psycho who kills prostitutes and removes their eyes is on the loose; a young law student has taken a job as the night watchman in a creepy morgue; the morgue has sinister secrets; the former night watchman has gone slightly insane; the red alarm on the wall of the guard area is in case the dead wake up... Pretty spooky stuff, huh? For about 20 minutes, yes. The film, however, is 101 minutes long.

Deftly shot by director-writer Ole Bornedal (remaking his own Dutch-language film **NATTE-VAGTEN**), these opening scenes draw on every motif essential to the genre: the fear of death, the fear of the dark, the fear of being alone. The scenes take us deep into a gothic designed morgue, shrouded in black plastic. First, we enter with an insane tour guide who mumbles prescient warnings. The second time, gulp, we're alone.

Like teenagers standing at the doors of a haunted house in an amusement park, the audience can feel the tension building to the breaking point; they're ready and willing to be scared. (Think of the claustrophobic opening moments of Stanley Kubrick's **THE SHINING**—no small praise.) Problem is, following these two brilliant scenes, the rhythm and content of the film fall apart so badly there is nothing left to recommend it.

Relying on worn-out and posterous film conventions, ludicrous coincidences, and silly red herrings—which are paraded in an uninteresting manner—the film ultimately plods towards an unsatisfying climax and an abrupt, anticlimactic conclusion. For example, when the killer is revealed, three-quarters of the way into the film, rather than shock, the effect is a big "So what?" Remember Vicki Vale walking into the Bat-

NIGHTWATCH

A great beginning, but then...



NIGHTWATCH: new guard Martin Bells (Ewan McGregor) finds himself trapped in the morgue by a psycho-killer seeking to frame him for a series of murders.

cave in **BATMAN**? Same mistake here. The killer just steps out from behind a door, and the audience feels cheated.

Bornedal shares writing credit with Steven Soderbergh (**SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE**), and it seems easy to recognize the scenes Soderbergh has contributed to the film: those teaming with twentysomething angst and sexual frustration, totally incongruous here. Also misplaced are attempts to connect the sexual frustrations of certain characters with acts of necrophilia, a move which should have shocked us, but simply feels forced and artificial.

Nick Nolte (**U-TURN**), as the brooding investigating officer, does nothing to advance his slumping career. As the prostitute Joyce, Alix Koromzay (**MIMIC**) offers some genuine moments of emotion on screen. Patricia Arquette (**ED WOOD**) is all but wasted here as a mousey girlfriend given little more to do than whine. As the over-the-top, thrill seeking James, Josh Brolin (**THE GOONIES**) never seems to connect the tortured soul he hopes to portray.

Halfway through the film, as freaky things start happening, student-turned-night-watchman Martin Bells (Ewan McGregor) com-

ments that the events happening to him are like "some movie on USA," where no one believes the hero until it's too late. The reference would have remained knowingly funny had it not turned out, unfortunately, that the movies on the USA Network are better than **NIGHTWATCH**.

On a short note, 1998 marks the 20th anniversary of **GREASE** (Paramount, 1978, 110 mins, PG), celebrated with a moderately successful theatrical reissue in April. In this kitschy ode to 1950s high school mores, the lead greaser (John Travolta) at Rydell High has a summer fling with a squeaky clean debutante (Olivia Newton-John, looking extremely pretty in pink) and must keep his cool when she moves to his town and attends his school in September. More interesting now as a study of over-the-top '70s musicals than '50s nostalgia, the movie is peppered with musical fantasy numbers including "Beauty School Dropout" in which Teen Angel Frankie Avalon offers some heavenly advice about staying in school, and the finale in which the lovebirds literally head for the clouds behind the wheel of the coolest flying car in town (now that's going Back to the Future). □

A PRICE ABOVE RUBIES

Director-writer: Boaz Yakin. Miramax, 4/98. 115 mins, R. With: Renée Zellweger.

Like **BREAKING THE WAVES**, this focuses on a young woman who runs afoul of her strict religious community. The difference is that **A PRICE ABOVE RUBIES** is set in the Hasidic community, where Sonja (Zellweger) finds herself unable to live the life allotted to her, including a marriage to a devout but passionless scholar. In short order she has an affair with her brother-in-law, gets a job at his jewelry store, discovers a young artist whose work she wants to sell, and finds herself ostracized for her indiscretions.

In a childhood prologue, Sonja's brother recounts a legend of a woman who fled from an arranged marriage and returned months later, pregnant with the child of a demon. When the demonic progeny died years later, she was refused entry into both Heaven and Hell (the Devil recognized her as his niece and couldn't bring himself to torture her); so she was left to wander the world for eternity. As an adult Sonja is visited by the ghost of her brother (who died as a boy). At first this seems to be a product of her imagination, but a beggar woman also shows up, capable of seeing the boy. When the old woman complains of endless years of wandering, we start to suspect she may be the child from the story, although she is clearly no demon. Instead, these two ghostly figures seem to imply that Sonja is more in touch with the spiritual world than the religious community that rejected her is. She learns from the old woman that the passions burning inside of her appear to be evil only because people are afraid of them.

Zellweger is strong in lead role, and the film maintains interest in her even when the story seems contrived: for instance, Sonja seems less like a product of her community looking for a way out than like an outsider who never fit in at all; and as unhappy as she is in her marriage, it's hard to believe she would tolerate the touch of her creepy brother-in-law. Fortunately, these flaws are offset by the mystical elements, which lend the story just a touch of the sublime, and the final resolution is nicely handled. ● ● Steve Biodrowski

SLIDING DOORS

Director-writer: Peter Howitt. Miramax, 4/98. 108 mins, PG-13. With: Gwyneth Paltrow, John Hannah, John Lynch, Jeane Tripplehorn.

A great "what if" premise propels this love story in which Paltrow plays two versions of the same character: one who caught her lover in bed with another woman and one who didn't. The result is intriguing and funny, intercutting between the two stories while never causing confusion. The script doesn't quite fully develop its central notion (that chance plays a big role in our lives because we avoid making difficult decisions until circumstances force us) and the story fumbles a bit trying to tie the two threads back together at the end; otherwise, this is highly recommended.

● ● ● Steve Biodrowski

CINEMA By Steve Biodrowski

MOVIE MIND-SET: *The way things happen on-screen.*

One of the strangest phenomena to be seen consistently upon the silver screen is the arbitrary ordering of events according to genre conventions. Often, how people behave has less to do with the dramatic integrity of the characterizations than with a forced attempt on the part of the filmmakers to make things happen a certain way *because that's the way things are supposed to happen in a movie*. This problem is especially aggravated in horror and science-fiction, where the genre requirements can all but overwhelm the story.

This point came through while sitting through a trio of recent films: *THE UGLY*, *NIGHTWATCH*, and *DEEP IMPACT*. Although considerable differences separate these films in terms of subject matter and quality, all three suffer from arbitrary plot developments that are inserted not because they are justified in the particular films but because they are things seen in films of their type.

THE UGLY is perhaps most egregious in this regard. For all the obvious talent of the filmmakers (the color scheme, the flashback structure, the clever transitions), the film is absolute nonsense from the word go. The story attempts to portray a *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*-type confrontation between a psychiatrist and a homicidal maniac. The problem is that Dr. Hannibal Lecter was a psychiatric genius himself, at least as intelligent as the people trying to probe him, whereas *THE UGLY*'s psycho-killer, Simon (Paolo Rotondu), is just a garden variety nutcase with neither the education nor the native cunning to make us believe he could outwit the doctor examining him. Clearly, the filmmakers were untroubled by Simon's lack of credibility in this regard; as far as they were concerned, *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* had established that lunatics are wily manipulators, so all they had to do was follow suit.

The rest of the scenario proceeds along similar lines: Karen (Rebecca Hobbs), the psychiatrist in question, seems neither experienced nor qualified enough to be expected to crack this supposedly tough nut. But hey, it's a movie, so we just have to assume she's brilliant. The past events of Simon's

childhood that she uncovers are almost laughable when intercut with the atrocities he committed as an adult. Again, we're expected to assume that childhood trauma automatically leads to homicidal psychosis—because that's how it happens in the movies—but what Simon suffers at the hands of his mother is woefully inadequate to explain his later madness. By any reasonable standard, it could barely account for his growing into a garden-variety neurotic, too shy to ask the neighborhood girl out for a date. By no stretch of the imagination can it explain why he became a murderer.

NIGHTWATCH is somewhat similar in that it, too, displays a considerable amount of visual style put to good effect in creating suspense and tension. But like *THE UGLY*, it relies on ridiculous story points in order to keep its plot moving along. My personal favorite occurs when when evidence is planted to incriminate innocent Martin Bells (Ewan McGregor) in the latest of a string of serial murders. Now, the police have from the beginning been insisting that only one man has committed all the murders, so they don't bother to look for any link between Martin and the previous victims; they just assume he killed them all. Likewise, Martin is far too stupid to establish an alibi for any of the previous murders (like, maybe was out with his girlfriend when they occurred). Instead, he simply goes back to work, so the

police will know where to find him alone. This sets up the climactic final-reel suspense scene, of course, but along the way destroys the credibility. Apparently, the filmmakers wouldn't have known how to force their protagonist into a corner, if any of the characters had acted as if they were in real life, not in a dumb genre movie.

Finally, *DEEP IMPACT* proves how avoiding one set of cliched developments doesn't necessarily lead to original story-telling; instead, it may simply lead to a different set of cliches. One has to admire this film for refusing to bow to the genre conventions one expects from disaster films: the emphasis isn't on the effects; the story aims for a broader range of emotions than expected; and there is no dumb, nudge-nudge comic relief to remind us that we're watching a summer blockbuster so we should all just sit back and have fun.

What we get, then, is the antithesis of *INDEPENDENCE DAY*; unfortunately, the result proves just how effective *ID4* was. The most important story element of *DEEP IMPACT*—trying to deal with the oncoming threat—takes a back seat to human interest stories that are sadly uninteresting. Although good and even great sequences emerge at irregular intervals, the desperate desire to avoid making "just a disaster movie" pushes the filmmakers away from what's exciting in their own story.

As with the previous films dis-

In *DEEP IMPACT*, Boris Tulchinsky (Alexander Baluev, l), and Gus Partenza (John Fabreau, r) make a final attempt to destroy the comet. The suspense of the suicide mission is ignored in favor of some sentimental farewells.



Films like *NIGHTWATCH* (w/Patricia Arquette) throw away credibility by resorting to tired plot developments.

cussed, instead of following the logical thread of the narrative, *DEEP IMPACT* arbitrarily introduces movie-type elements to punch up the narrative. For instance, the opening shows an astronomer (Charley Martin Smith) crashing off a mountain road after discovering the collision course of the comet. We expect this to have some dramatic impact like preventing the news from getting to the proper authorities, but it has none (he called before leaving the observatory). The scene is completely gratuitous to the story, but it does one thing: it gets an explosion into the first five minutes, which must have made the executives happy because the special effects don't kick in until nearly the halfway point, and the big destruction scenes don't occur until the last five minutes.

Instead, we watch a TV reporter (Tea Leoni) uncover the government's plans to deal with the disaster (whopty-doo!), followed by much noble sacrifice, reconciliation, and tearful farewells—until the advent of the comet becomes almost eagerly anticipated in the hope that it will put an end to all the heavy-handed melodrama. The truly frightening thing about *DEEP IMPACT* is not the approaching collision; it is the suggestion that an Extinction Level Event would turn the lives of the entire population of Earth into a bad soap opera. □

SPECIES II

Director: Peter Medak. Writer: Chris Brancato, based on characters by Dennis Feldman. With: Michael Madsen, Natasha Henstridge, Marg Helgenberger, Mykelti Williamson, George Dzundza, James Cromwell, Justin Lazard. MGM, 4/98. 93 mins. R.

"It's awful; it's just awful," gasps Marg Helgenberger in one scene of this absolutely abysmal follow-up to the entertaining 1995 hit. Truer words were never spoken: it's as if the filmmakers suddenly realized the quality of their own work. This self-awareness is admirable, but it would have been truly honorable if they had included this line in the trailer, as a warning to audiences.

SPECIES II had a certain integrity to its plot: having conceived an alien on the loose, scripter Dennis Feldman treated the scenario like a piece of science-fiction, at least to the extent of maintaining some logic about how Sil behaved and how her human pursuers could capture her. *SPECIES II*, on the other hand, is an out-and-out dumb gore horror movie, in which the behavior of the alien genetic material varies from scene to scene, depending on what's good for the best shock effect. Filled with repeated scenes of sexual couplings leading to grisly death, the result is about as loathsome as producer Frank Mancuso's late and unlamented *FRIDAY THE 13TH* sequels.

Apparently sensing this, the cast walk through their roles, without the conviction and camaraderie that marked the first film. At least Peter Boyle does a decent job in an unbilled supporting role, and Richard Belzer is good for a chuckle in a brief cameo as the President (you have only a few seconds to figure out whether he's doing Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan).

Director Peter Medak, who has handled genre material with competence in the past (*THE CHANGELING*), serves everything up with a straight face and a pedestrian style, when an outrageous, over-the-top approach might have at least enlivened the mechanical plot. Only the finale sparks a tiny flicker of interest: all those slimy tentacles have less to do with designer H.R. Giger (who wisely disowned the film) than with a failed attempt to visualize the excesses of Japanese adult anime in live-action. When the male alien forces a phallic tendril into the female alien's mouth, viewers can marvel at seeing a depiction (admittedly twisted) of oral sex in a mainstream, R-rated movie. The unanswered question, of course, is: why would filmmakers who would cringe at the thought of "pornography"—i.e., realistic depictions of healthy sexual activity—feel comfortable about purveying trash like this instead? ○ Steve Biodrowski

TARZAN AND THE LOST CITY

Director: Carl Schenkel. Screenplay: Bayard Johnson, J. Anderson Black, based on the stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Warners, 4/98. 84 mins. PG. With: Casper Van Dien, Jane March.

This is an unexceptional addition to the endless canon of Tarzan films. Billed by producer Stanley Canter as a sequel to his 1984 film, *GREYSTOKE: THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, LORD OF THE APES*, the film actually does a



In a scene worthy of producer Frank Mancuso Jr.'s *FRIDAY THE 13TH* films, Anne Sampas (Myriam Cyr) dies horribly after making love in *SPECIES II*.

great disservice to its 14-year-old progenitor. Though not perfect, *GREYSTOKE* at least strove for a measure of originality by attempting to more faithfully adapt Edgar Rice Burroughs' novel, *Tarzan of the Apes*. Christopher Lambert portrayed a conflicted Tarzan, torn between his wild jungle upbringing and unsolicited assimilation into elite British society. Lambert's successor, Casper Van Dien, brings nothing new to the role, instead reverting to the typical cinematic portrayal of the ape man as a well-adjusted, archetypal hero. But even that depiction fails to entertain here. Van Dien is two-dimensional and lifeless, possessing the jungle hero's muscularity but none of his charisma or charm. However, blame can't be laid solely on his square shoulders; much of the character's impotence derives from a painfully vapid script.

The fantasy-esque premise is simple, if not original. Mercenaries steal a sacred medallion from African tribesmen that points them to the mystical lost city of Opar. Led by Nigel Ravens (the banal Steven Waddington), they plan to plunder the city, which apparently is the cradle of civilization. Tribal shaman Mugambi (Winston Ntshona) summons Tarzan from England via a vision. Leaving Jane (an insipidly clichéd Jane March) on their wedding eve, Tarzan returns to Africa to help.

What follows is an hour of protracted setup and subplots as Tarzan warns off Ravens (rather than simply disposing of him immediately), then reunites with Jane for the obligatory-yet-trite romance arc. Largely forgotten until the film's end is the plot that allegedly drives the movie: the search for Opar. When finally revisited, we're presented with a surprisingly ineffectual Tarzan. No longer the mighty Lord of the Jungle who can wrestle lions and alligators into submission, he easily succumbs to a snake bite. He's saved only by Mugambi's timely magical illusions and healing powers. Tarzan's worth is reduced further when the "lost" Opar—

actually just a lone pyramid situated on the other side of a cavernous mountain, completely exposed to anyone searching from the opposite direction!—is discovered. Fully protected by Mugambi's illusions, magically created warriors and the pyramid's own mystical entrapments, what need is there of Tarzan in defeating the brainless mercenaries?

Sadly, the answer is none. Mugambi doesn't need Tarzan's help, rendering his presence meaningless and *LOST CITY*'s entire plot pointless. This irrelevance, coupled with an inexplicably preposterous climax, is unfathomable. In the end, it's the audience, not the city, that's truly lost.

○ Matthew F. Saunders

MADE-FOR-TELEVISION

ATOMIC DOG

Director: Brian Trenchard-Smith. Writer: Miguel Tejada-Flores. USA Cable, 1/98. 2 hrs. w/ commercials. With: Daniel Hugh Kelly, Isabella Hofman, Cindy Pickett, Micah Gardner, Katie Stuart

Shaggy dog nonsense about a cute lil' pup in the care of a janitor in a nuclear facility. The pup—aptly named Cerberus—is left behind just before the plant is closed due to a low-level radiation leak. One year later, the grown dog is now super intelligent, has obvious black coloring differences to denote its evil intentions, and impregnates a family dog. This dog dies in labor, but not before giving birth to a male and female, the boy taking after dear old irradiated dad's homicidal tendencies. Suddenly, Kelly, Pickett and their TV kids arm themselves with rifles and, under the auspices of a local expert on carnivores, go hunting the local atomic mutt.

This whole business is played with utmost seriousness, and really shouldn't have been. The filmmakers obviously did a little reading up on canine behavior, but seem to have gotten their knowledge of low-level radiation from 1950s comic books. The AD of the title can suddenly use simple tools, untie knots, bury its dead, stalk and trick its

human prey and do a little second story vandalism on the family homestead. The humans, including Pickett (who is obviously wasted in junk like this) talk to their dogs like Timmy used to talk to Lassie, even understanding little barks to get the valuable info. And Kelly, who fared much better in the excellent *CUJO*, is some kind of amateur inventor who protects his family from the vicious mutt by using a homemade "environmentally safe" smoke alarm that gives off high-pitched frequencies, and the fact that it looks a lot like a Yak-Bak toy doesn't seem to matter to anyone. Goofy silliness that isn't given the humor that could have made it entertaining. ● Frederick C. Szebin

BABYLON 5: IN THE BEGINNING

Director: Mike Vejar. Writer: J. Michael Straczynski. TNT, 1/98. 2 hrs. w/commercials. With: Bruce Boxleitner, Peter Jurasik, Mira Furlan, Andreas Katsulas, Richard Biggs.

For five years, Straczynski has been setting up his epic science fiction tale of love and hatred, treachery and redemption. During those years, back story and personal histories have been filled in with flashbacks, bits of dialogue, and entire episodes in which the future was dictated by actions from the past. Now, as his series reaches its fruition, a need was found to detail mankind's first disastrous steps into the cosmic night that led to the creation of the "last best hope for peace." And on the whole, it is quite successful.

The events that led to the creation of the Babylon stations begin with the bloody Human/Minbari war, in which a mere cultural misunderstanding led to Earth's near-destruction: when the first human ships approach a Minbari craft, the aliens open their weapon ports, a show of open hands to let an encountering race see the power of the beings they are approaching. To Earthers, however, it is a sign of attack, and thus began a series of battles that all but decimated mankind.

The story is told in flashback by a sick and dying Londo (Jurasik) as his home world is burning around him due to the Shadow invasion of season four. Much of the telefilm is quite good, living up to the series' standards in both writing, direction, and special effects. But about halfway through, anyone who has followed the series begins to wonder just how necessary this picture is. *IN THE BEGINNING* doesn't fill in as many holes as it simply details information given throughout the first four seasons. It is necessary, also, to be a follower of the series for all the events to be appreciated for their dramatic and historical context, particularly the final shot, which shows Londo watching a vid of Sheridan (Boxleitner) and Delenn (Furlan) sharing a private moment in Londo's prison, a direct and pointed dramatic moment from a season four episode. But since the show's new home, TNT, is running the original episodes five days a week, it won't be too difficult for new viewers to catch up, a definite necessity to really appreciate this fine science fiction telefilm. ●●● Frederick C. Szebin

THE WATCHER

By Frederick C. Szegin

Off the air for over a decade, but never officially cancelled, the BBC, through CBS Fox Video, is giving the good Doctor a sort of lease on life by releasing more DOCTOR WHO titles on home video. The latest lot focuses on the Sylvester McCoy years, the seventh Doctor who, with his explosives expert companion Ace (Sophie Aldred), traverses time and space in search of wrongs to write. The first release is the 1987 serial **BATTLEFIELD** (directed by Michael Kerrigan; written by Ben A. Aronovitch), which brings old Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (Nicholas Courtney) out of retirement to help our favorite time lord stop a dimensional breach by knights with laser guns.

In **BATTLEFIELD**, we learn that King Arthur, his round-table knights, and their enemy Morgaine La Fay weren't good old Brits fighting for their piece of the empire, but aliens led by Merlin—the Doctor in a future guise—to keep La Fay and her dimension-spanning knights from taking over the world. Centuries later, the Doctor follows a distress signal to the contemporary English countryside just as Morgaine (Jean Marsh) has sent forces to destroy Arthur and reclaim the sword of power, none other than Excaliber.

It is a rousing WHO adventure that has an obvious weakness in the WHO tradition; trying to fill up a rambling concept with an "army" of extras of about one dozen. This story might have worked particularly well on paper, but the budgetary limitations of the DR. WHO series show painfully in the integral battle scenes when six UNIT guys try to ward off Morgaine's army of six other guys. As the Doctor, McCoy was the most bombastic of them all, over doing it more than just a tad with a blaring voice when a mere shout would have done. Aldred was a fun-loving, attractive companion whose love for anything remotely explosive could be a boon for the Doctor at any given moment, but **BATTLEFIELD** shows a particular awkwardness in execution that previous Doctors seemed to work around. While not one of the best, it is still the Doctor, long may he wave.

In the second McCoy opus from Fox video, **THE HAPPINESS**

THE DOCTOR IS IN Classic TV available on video.



Sylvester McCoy, the last actor to star in the long running BBC-TV series DR. WHO, can now be seen in his classic episodes, available on videotape.

PATROL (directed by Chris Clough; written by Graeme Curry), the good Doctor and friend Ace land on an Earth colony in the distant future to find it run by a grinning fiend (Sheila Hancock) who enforces happiness on her people in a most grim fashion. The Happiness Patrol is a gun-toting, cotton candy-haired group of hardened females in happy little miniskirts who track down Killjoys, those who refuse to be happy, so that they can make them "disappear" from the happy little landscape. Of course, the Doctor takes offense to this crime against human nature and sets about to make things right. In doing so, he has to deal with the Candyman, a confection-laden Mengele android whose homemade sweets are designed to send its munchers to the sweet hereafter.

THE HAPPINESS PATROL isn't a particularly good entry in the DOCTOR WHO library. It's unorig-

inality is glaring; an inspiration lifted directly from **A BOY AND HIS DOG** has the inhabitants of the colony wearing painted-on faces to hide their gloom, and the entire story is an uninspired lift of the Tom Baker adventure **THE SUN MAKERS**, but without that serial's style or humor. McCoy's Doctor isn't one of the more interesting, although he does belt out a particularly nice verse of "As Time Goes By," and can pull the occasional coin out of thin air. Maybe it was just the material, but the concept seemed to be getting tired by the time this 1988 adventure made its way to the screen. Despite a nice ending in which the Patrol's leader finally discovers how a little sadness can affect our lives, and the wonderful line from McCoy, "There are no other colors without the blues," **THE HAPPINESS PATROL** is a sullen let-down from the better adventures of the Doctor's previous selves. □

Dr. Who? Sylvester McCoy, that's who!

By Steve Biodrowski

Sylvester McCoy was the last actor to portray DR. WHO on the long-running BBC series. Although his adventures may be less familiar to American viewers than those of Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker (whose episodes were extensively shown on PBS), he gained higher visibility with his cameo appearance at the beginning of the Fox Network's made-for-television DR WHO movie, and now some of his classic episodes have reached these shores on videotape. Today, McCoy is happy to be part of the history of a show that existed long before he became a part of it. "I knew about it, and I was a fan," he recalled. "I started watching when the second Doctor, Patrick Troughton, was in it. I enjoyed it a lot, but then when I started working as an actor, I couldn't really follow it, so I lost the habit of watching. But I was aware of it; it's a national institution in this country. I mean even today, out in Trafalgar square, I was launching the time thing [countdown] for the millennium, because of DR. WHO, ten years after I started doing it."

McCoy landed the role after seeing in the news that the previous actor, Colin Baker, was leaving. "I phoned up my agent and said, 'There's an acting job going. Get in touch with the BBC.' And he did. As luck would have it, the next phone call the producer got was from another producer at the BBC, who said, 'Listen, I think Sylvester McCoy would make a very good Doctor.' And the producer of DR. WHO said, 'What, are you working for the same agent?' Just by this coincidence, this made the producer interested. I was at that time at the Royal Nation Theatre, playing the Pied Piper, a musical that had been written for me; he came to see that, and it was a very good audition piece for Dr. Who."

As with the other actors in the role, McCoy's interpretation of the Doctor relied somewhat on his own personality. "Well, you have both a little say, and you have the writers trying to write for you," he explained. "The writers, in a way, spend most of their imagination writing for the other characters, because the Doctor is there—he's been created. I supposed it gets its individuality from the fact that they try to employ actors who have got a lot of personality themselves. I mean, other actors haven't got a lot of personality, but that doesn't mean they're not good actors; some of them are stunning actors—chameleons—but in their own life

continued on page 61

Beyond THE BEYOND: Resurrecting Lucio Fulci's cult masterpiece from distribution limbo.

By John Thonen

Among the ranks of Euro-Horror icons—Bava and Freda, Dario Argento, Jean Rollin and even Jess Franco—one name engenders the most polar of reactions. He is associated at once with extreme gore, hypnotic atmosphere, and surreal imagery. Whether anathema or godhead, the late Lucio Fulci made films certain to get a reaction.

Now, U.S. audiences are getting a chance to react to the best of Fulci. Since June, Quentin Tarantino's Rolling Thunder Films, in association with Cowboy Booking Intl. and Grindhouse Productions, has been booking midnight screenings nationwide of the director's 1981 masterwork, *THE BEYOND*. This is the first time the U.S. has had a chance to see the film as the director intended. Retitled *7 DOORS OF DEATH* in the early-'80s, it played a few theaters, then went to home video. The film was drastically cut, ruining Fulci's technique of alternating between lyrical, Val Lewton-inspired sequences and shock moments of unrelenting grue. The distributors first cut the violence; then, left largely with the slower scenes, they trimmed more to quicken the pace, and even replaced Fabio Frizzi's moody score. Adding insult to injury, the print was alternately dark or washed-out. Thanks to



Dr. MacCabe (David Warbeck) and Liza (Catriona MacColl) are trapped in Hell, "an immobile world where every horizon is the same," Fulci once said.

the efforts of Euro-fanatic and Grindhouse co-owner Sage (son of Sly) Stallone, a pristine, 35mm Cinemascope, English language print was unearthed. Grindhouse will later release a laser disc, featuring supplementary material by stars Catriona MacColl and the late David Warbeck.

Fulci's daughter Antonella was stunned by the new print. "Sergio Salvati, the director of photography, and others who worked on it, when they saw the new copy they said they didn't remember that it was so beautiful," she said. "All the video copies had been very bad—dark and ugly. It lost many of the emotions." She described her father's frequent collaborator Salvati as "like a painter with light. In Italy we have a tradition of craftsmen. It began with Mario

Bava, who was a master. The others, they have to live to the standards he made. Sergio could do this. This is why my father loved to work with him."

The film opens with the 1927 murder of a painter accused of being a warlock, who has been residing in the Seven Doors Hotel, built upon one of the Seven Gateways to Hell. Presented in a magnificent sepia tone, and filmed much in the manner of a '30s Universal horror film, this sequence's classic elements are counterpointed by detailing the warlock being whipped with chains, crucified, covered in burning hot mortar, then walled-up alive. The minimal plot involves a young, present-day woman who inherits the hotel. Regarding the film, Fulci once said, "It was my idea to make an absolute movie. Actually, this is a movie without plot, without logic, only a sequence of pictures." In a story structure akin to that of an advanced fever dream, Fulci achieved his goal.

Inspired by Fulci and co-writer Dardano Sacchetti's concept of the Seven Doors to Hell, Cowboy Booking got the re-release off to a notable start with a seven city premiere on June 12. This was quite a surprise

for actress Catriona MacColl. "It's quite exciting," she said from her home in France. "It's a cult that seems to be growing, and I'm probably the last person who knows why." Between 1980 and 1981, the British-born MacColl worked on three Fulci films, the only lead actress to work with him more than once. "His reputation was that he was very difficult with actresses," she explained. "I think he quite enjoyed watching them suffer. I saw it a few times myself."

MacColl recalled that *CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1980, released in the U.S. as *THE GATES OF HELL*) included a scene in which she "was being bombarded by a rain of worms. It was one of the times I felt he was getting a sadistic pleasure out of watching. I was humiliated, and I cried, and the more I cried the more he let the camera run." Considering that experience,



Left: the oracular Emily (Antonella Interlenghi) is hounded by the ghost of the murdered artist Schweik. Right: MacColl's Liza is bedeviled by zombies in the hospital.



MacColl is surprisingly fond of the director. "People must think me an oddball when I say I liked him," she admitted. "He did have a tyrannical quality, shouting constantly, but as the expression goes, his bark was worse than his bite. I felt strangely relaxed with Lucio. He made me laugh."

The feeling was mutual, said the director's daughter: "He loved her. It wasn't easy to find good actresses with the money my father had," said Antonella. "She had to be courageous, too. When you see scenes like in *GATES OF HELL*, when the pick breaks through the coffin right by her face, she was really there. It comes across so real," she laughed, "because it is real."

Catriona never expected her Fulci films to be revived almost two decades later, but she watched the restored film closely. "They wanted it to have an American quality, but it really is a very European picture," she explained. "It has a poetic, surreal, ethereal quality that the Italians are very good at. I don't know that they were conscious of that nightmare quality. Sergio Salvati had worked often with Lucio, so maybe they had discussed this. My guess is they hadn't. I think this happens with films—some chemistry of making the movie that comes out a kind of magic. It's part of what makes movie making so exciting."

Catriona was also taken with one of the film's memorably eerie sequences when her character meets a blind girl, Emily (Antonella Interlenghi), and her seeing-eye dog in the center of an empty bridge. "When I saw it again, I noticed that we look rather alike. It felt somewhat like I was meeting my darker self. I don't know how conscious Lucio was of that—perhaps very—but it does seem there is a link between the two of them. Emily was very fragile and surreal. You get the feeling that I am in the real world and she is not—which is how it turns out to be."

The re-release of *THE BEYOND*, coincident with the release of *ZOMBIE* on laserdisc, may bring a posthumous fame Fulci never found in life, despite a prolific career (over 50 films) that began in 1959. His first efforts were comedies—like *IL MANIACI* (1964), with horror

continued on page 60

RESURRECTIONS

By Steve Biodrowski

There is a wall, an outer envelope like the sound barrier, against which horror films often hopelessly slam on their way to an inevitable crash-and-burn. This barrier separates what can be shown on screen from what can be sensed in the mind. True horror should have a metaphysical component that reaches down into the soul, but most horror films settle for simple suspense, based on the jump-and-scare tactics of who will survive and who will perish. Even *HELLRAISER*, which had its cenobites promise to "tear your soul apart," actually did nothing of the kind, instead opting for the sight of rending flesh.

Lucio Fulci's undead epics, with their over-the-top depictions of graphic violence, fall squarely into this splatter category—or so it seems, at first. Actually, there is a little something more going on: a kind of demented, despairing metaphysical speculation. Working with meager resources in an exploitation genre that demanded strong appeal to a core audience, Fulci never developed his notions into something that could be called an unqualified masterpiece, but he did leave us with at least one film that struggles mightily to go Beyond the wall that stops so many other horror films.

THE BEYOND is the third of three zombie films that Fulci made after *DAWN OF THE DEAD*, but it is equally inspired by Argento's *INFERNO*: both films posit a series of buildings connected with a supernatural phenomenon (in *IN-*

In one of Fulci's more effective pieces of dream-like imagery, the blind Emily is discovered waiting on the middle of a bridge. How did she get there?



THE BEYOND: Re-opening the Gates of Hell.



The discovery of the entombed body of Schweik, whose paintings of *The Beyond* led to accusations of sorcery, unwittingly opens the Doorway to Hell.

INFERNO they house the three Mothers of Darkness; in *THE BEYOND*, they surmount the Seven Gateways to Hell); both portray the supernatural elements in ways that defy rational understanding; and both abandon traditional plot structures in order to disorient and confuse the audience into a state of unreasoning dread.

Despite the similarities, *THE BEYOND* manages to stand on its own—if not as a completely original work, then as an inspired entry distinguished by memorable touches of its own. In fact, the borrowings actually help Fulci overcome his limitations and emphasize his strengths. Anyone who has seen *ZOMBIE* or *THE GATES OF*

HELL knows that the director could be lackadaisical in his handling of characters and exposition, but when the horror emerged, there was no one who could turn the screws so tightly on an audience. For instance, the infamous eyeball scene in *ZOMBIE* may be gratuitously graphic, but it is also one of the single most horrifying moments ever recorded on film, guaranteed to make even the most jaded genre fanatic squirm in his seat.

Truthfully, *THE BEYOND* has no single moment to match that scene; fortunately, it doesn't need one. The gore effects by Gianetto DeRossi (which include slivered glass, burning acid, biting spiders, and—yes—more gouged eyes) come across with less impact—like an obligatory attempt to top previous efforts. On the other hand, the very arbitrary excess of the carnage serves a kind of larger purpose. It's as if Fulci were destroying the flesh, burning it away in some alchemical process, in order to leave nothing behind but the spiritual essence of horror.

As far-fetched as this sounds, it works in concert with the intentionally fragmentary story line, which is almost devoid of plot development. Basically, once one of the dreaded Seven Doorways has been opened, Hell gradually encroaches on Earth, in ways the characters cannot begin to fathom. The lack of clear plot connections only increases the feeling of a

continued on page 62

ANIMATION By Mike Lyons

STAGE FRIGHT and GERI'S GAME Two great animated short subjects tour the festival circuit.

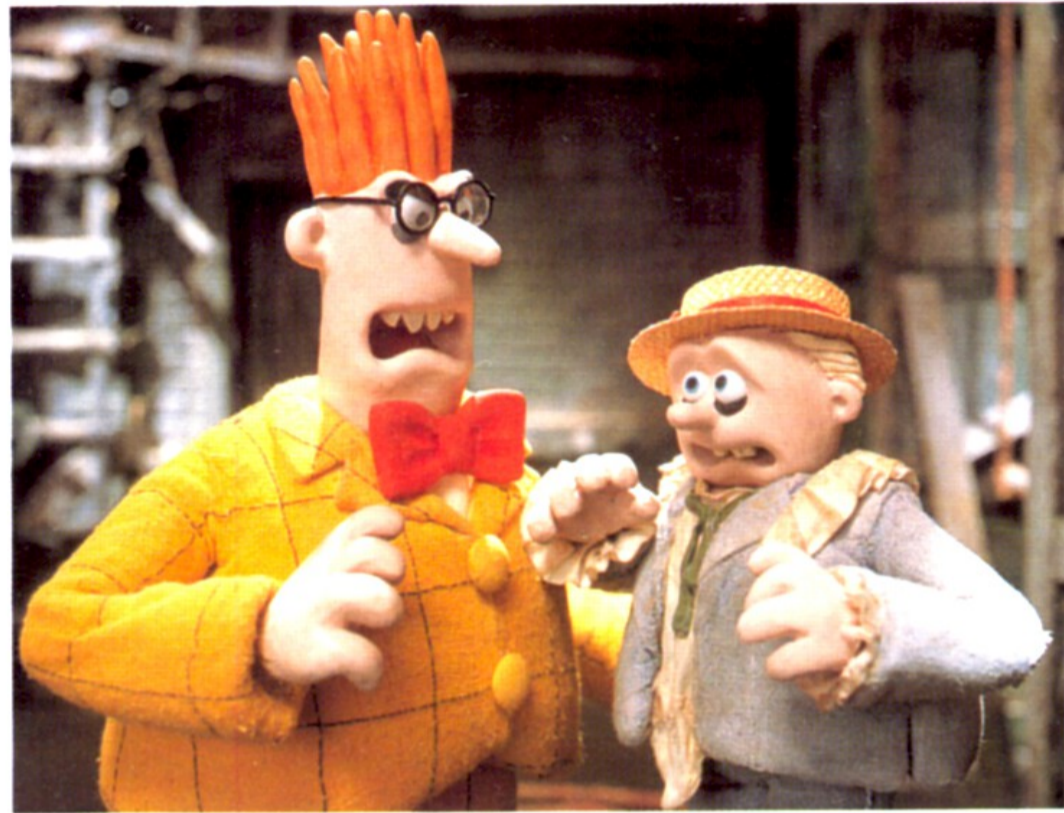
Aardman Animations, the consistently pleasing stop-motion animation studio, continues to amaze with **STAGE FRIGHT** (1997, 11 mins), which has been touring the art house circuit as part of *Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation*. Written and directed by Steve Box, the short subject features all of the wonderful animated acrobatics that the studio has employed in past efforts. A melancholy look at how vaudeville was crushed by the cinema, **STAGE FRIGHT** centers on Tiny, a meek, Quasimodo-like character who trains dogs for the theater. He is somewhat betrayed by his love interest Daphne, who sells out Tiny's dog training ability (as well as his cute, bug-eyed dogs) to a british silver screen star.

The villain's comeuppance at the film's conclusion is a wonderful metaphor for power hungry celebrities literally being killed by their profession. Within such a story, director Box employs some brilliant maneuvers, such as the non-linear plot structure, a dark, dingy look reminiscent of French director Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*DELICATESSEN*), incredible editing that switches back and forth from film to real life, and stop-motion fluidity that is a wonder to behold.

The only downside is the brief length. The film ends just as the characters are developing. Though not as compelling as last year's *WAT'S PIG* or the popular *Wallace and Gromit* shorts, **STAGE FRIGHT** still emerges as another stroke of Aardman genius.

Also part of the *Spike and Mike Festival of Animation* is **GERI'S GAME** (Pixar, 1997), the winner of this year's Oscar for Best Animated Short Subject. Although not as involving or humorous as other short subjects from Pixar (the pre-emi-

Also a part of the *Spike and Mike Festival of Animation* is Pixar's Oscar-winner, **GERI'S GAME**.



Aardman Animations' **STAGE FRIGHT**, about a timid dog trainer terrorized by an obnoxious film star, can be seen in *Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation*.

nent computer animation studio, whose works include *RED'S DREAM* or *KNOCKNACK*), it's still an enjoyable piece of filmmaking. Devoid of dialogue, it tells the story of an elderly man who initiates a vicious game of chess against himself, which actually turns ugly, with bizarre and comic results.

Unlike so much computer animation today, writer-director Jan Pinkava unfolds **GERI'S GAME** at a leisurely pace, employing marvelous attention to details, such as the chess pieces spilling across the board, dappled sunlight peeking through the background trees, and the tactile "feel" of Geri's sports coat. Geri himself is also amazing to watch, a "synthespian" (a terrifying new word for computer-generated actors) of the highest caliber. With grunts and groans, he lands his spindly body on a chair, adjusts his glasses delicately, and smacks his toothless gums with glee.

Like **STAGE FRIGHT**, **GERI'S GAME** runs a very brief length, which hinders character development. Pixar was able to create personalities with their full-length *TOY STORY*, but it's evident that the filmmakers were not afforded such luxuries here.

With its '60s animation look and Saturday-morning, threadbare style, there was a glimmer of hope to **HERCULES AND ZENA: THE ANIMATED MOVIE, THE BATTLE FOR MOUNT OLYMPUS** (Universal Home Video, 4/98), a mouthful of a direct-to-video title, that brings the characters from the popular syndicated series to the cartoon realm. Maybe this was going to be a send-up and celebration of the days of *SPACE GHOST* and *GIGANTOR*? Sadly, that hope turned out to be only a glimmer.

HERCULES AND ZENA is just another means of cashing in that will probably entertain only younger audiences. The film does employ

a different look, with interesting, pastel backgrounds and a tone that is somewhere between anime and *REN AND STIMPY*. Utilizing the voices of Kevin Sorbo and Lucy Lawless and employing the same campiness of the series helps capture the feel of the show. But, this story of saving Olympus from the monstrous Titans brings no surprises and, at times, seems slightly derivative of Disney's *HERCULES* (there are even a group of Muses who sing the film's opening number). Overall, **HERCULES AND ZENA** is depressingly static animation coupled with innumerable "action" scenes. During one of them, Hercules quips, "Ya know, this could go on forever." You may just feel the same way about the film.

Another recent video release is **ANIMALAND**, a compilation of animated short subjects, from the Golden Age of the medium, that have been considered missing for over 50 years, until they were recovered by Just for Kids Home Video, who debuted them for the first time in the US, this past spring. These shorts were produced in England in the '40s and '50s by David Hand, a name instantly recognizable to buffs from his work at the Disney studio on *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS*, *BAMBI*, *PINOCCHIO*, *DUMBO* and *FANTASIA*.

Hand (who passed away in 1986) began his animation career during the early days of the Disney Studio (he was the fourth person Walt hired!). In 1944, he left Disney and moved to England, where he helped form Gaumont-British Animation Studios. It was here that Hand produced the *ANIMALAND* series, which centers on a group of *BAMBI*-like woodland and jungle animals.

The video compiles nine short subjects, which display the same rich artistry that Hand brought to his work at Disney. The animation is fluid, and the backgrounds are pleasingly soft, but for the most part, the sight gags and humor (there is little or no dialogue) seem somewhat dated and derivative of the slapstick Warner Bros. and MGM shorts of the time. The character design is also somewhat bland; with their big blue eyes and goofy grins, the characters seem like standard animated animals seen "How to Draw" books. Still, with all their cartooniness, the characters are fun to watch, and it's obvious that Hand picked up some strong personality animation skills at Disney.

The short subjects in *ANIMALAND* move at a pace that may bore today's younger audience accustomed to the frenetic energy of contemporary cartoons; however, scholars and buffs will no doubt find it to be a fascinating look at an unearthed treasure. □



A puny parrot out-talks the bird-brained purple dinosaur

BARNEY'S GREAT ADVENTURE

A Polygram Filmed Entertainment release, produced by Sheryl Leach and Dennis DeShazer. Executive producers: Ben Myron, Martha Chang. Director: Steve Gomer. Screenplay by Stephen White; story by White, Leach, and DeShazer. Cinematographer: Sandi Sissel, A.S.C. Editor: Richard Halsey, A.C.E. Production designer: Vincent Jefferds. Art director: Colin Niemi. Costumes 4/98, 87 mins, G.

Dad.....Alan Fawcett
 Mom.....Jane Wheeler
 Marcella.....Kyla Pratt
 Abby.....Diana Rice
 Cody.....Trevor Morgan
 Barney (Body).....David Joyner
 Barney (Voice).....Bob West
 Abby.....Diana Rice

PAULIE

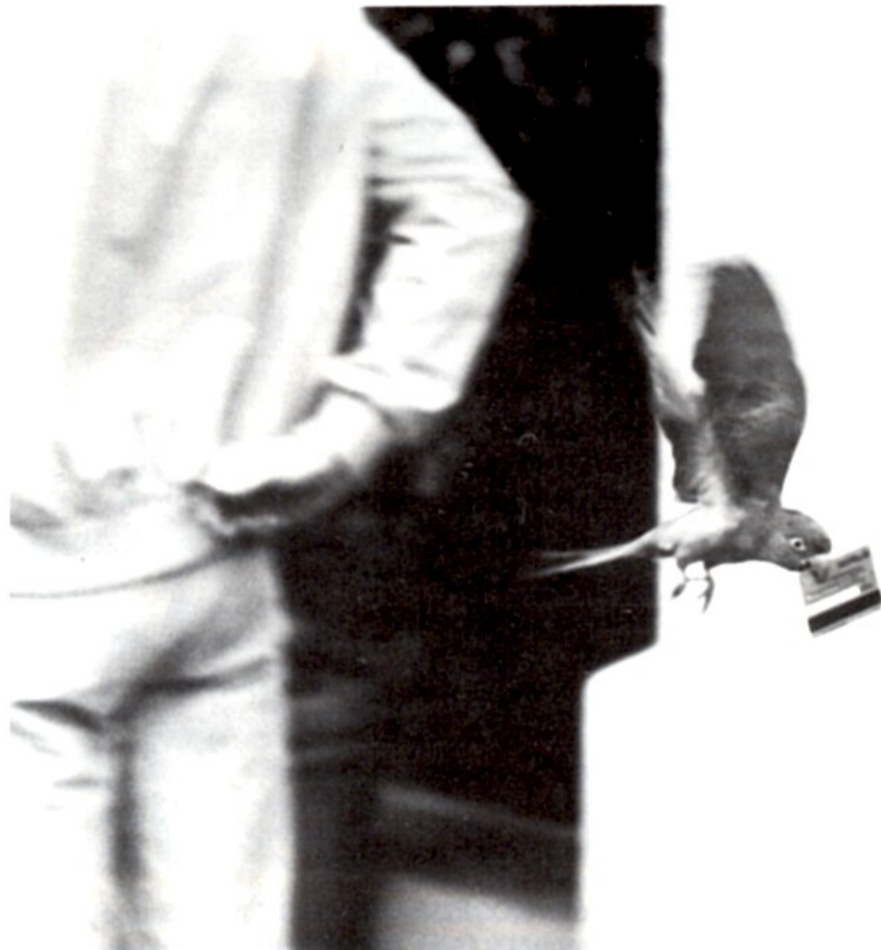
DreamWorks Pictures presents a Mutual Film Company production. Producer: Mark Gordon, Gary Levinsohn, Allison Lyon Segal. Executive producer: Ginny Nugent. Director: John Roberts. Writer: Laurie Craig. Production designer: Dennis Washington. Art director: Tom Taylor. Editor: Bruce Cannon. Sound: Conte Matal. Music: John Debney. 4/98, 91 mins, PG.

Ivy.....Gena Rowlands
 Misha.....Tony Shalhoub
 Ignacio.....Cheech Marin
 Dr. Feingold.....Bruce Davison
 Adult Marie.....Trini Alvarado
 Paulie/Benny.....Jay Mohr
 Artie.....Buddy Hackett
 Marie.....Hallie Kate Eisenberg
 Warren.....Nat Craven
 Virgil.....Bill Cobbs
 Ruby/Lupe.....Tia Texada
 Lila.....Laura Harrington
 Grad Student #1.....Peter Basch
 Grad Student #2.....Emily Mura-Smith
 Grandpa.....Hal Robinson

by Sonya Burres

I have never seen Barney on television or anywhere else for that matter. The only thing I have ever heard about the purple dinosaur is not very nice: when he first arrived on the small screen a few years back, from the imagination of two Moms, he was rumored to be Republican propaganda—a way to teach their right-wing politics to our young children. Well, I am relieved to say that I'm not too worried, and for the sake of the Republican party, I hope they can do better. Yeah, BARNEY'S GREAT ADVENTURE does present traditional family values within a very traditional family yet so do many other things with which children come in contact. So after I got over my Democratic paranoia, I was ready to sit back and enjoy. I was rather disappointed.

The children are as wholesome as the four basic food groups; their banality made me long for the odd-looking kid Jodie Foster once was or the androgynous child, Linda Manz. Abigail and Cody are brother and sister, and Marcella is Abby's African-American friend. Most politically correct. I'm not sure they are real children as much as actors dressed to look the part.



It may not be *BABE*, but *PAULIE*'s story of an intelligent, talking parrot searching for its owner is good enough to delight both children and their parents.

Banished to their grandparents' farm for a week, the girls are thrilled at the possibilities of farm life. Cody, on the other hand, longs for a really big, excellent adventure. Instead of Bill and Ted, the kids get Barney. Oh well, if I was five I might appreciate some guy in a padded suit with a mouth that moves only up and down, spewing his form of wisdom: the power of imagination is necessary to enjoy life. Ho hum.

Cody's adventure arrives in the form of a strange-looking multi-colored egg. Unable to understand it, grandmother suggests they take it to the woman next door who studies birds. With Barney as their spiritual guide, the kids traipse through an overgrown forest to the neighbor's home. And though Ms. or Mrs. (the terms are used interchangeably) Goldfinch's lair is reminiscent of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, the charm is forced. The meaning of the mysterious egg is soon discovered, but through a series of mishaps, the egg is lost. Barney and the children race through a magical world, with the egg always one step ahead of them. Be warned: they sing a lot while doing this.

PAULIE, on the other hand, is an unexpected surprise: a movie for children that takes itself as seriously as if it were for adults. The story follows an intelligent, talking

parrot separated from his best friend and owner, five-year-old Maria. Trying desperately to get back to her, Paulie discovers kind strangers and con men, lonely hearts and love, self-determination and courage. The enchanting script from Laurie Craig is full of life. It provides both messages and digs at who really is an "illegal alien," at well-meaning parents putting too much pressure on their young children, on taking a stand and not being afraid to try something.

The result is a film with won-

derfully nuanced performances by excellent actors, with not a movie star among them. Tony Shalhoub, whose performance in *BIG NIGHT* has endeared him to everyone (maybe some day he'll get to play an "American"), is a Russian immigrant, a teacher of literature in his native land relegated to cleaning offices in the biology building of a University. Gena Rowlands is a tough, compassionate, adventurous but lonely widow who takes Paulie halfway across the country in her Winnebago. Cheech Marin gives the performance of his career as the hard-working, fun-loving, illegal alien, who is a proud owner of a taco stand in East L.A. Jay Mohr is the voice of the irresistible Paulie. Only Bruce Davison seems a little out of place as the bad guy, a professor who punishes Paulie by banishing him to a cage in the basement after his refusal to talk in front of the professor's colleagues. (thereby making him the fool instead of the Nobel prize laureate he thought he would be).

Complete with a *Peter Pan*-ending with Paulie finally reunited with his beloved Marie, the film is not too heavy-handed, successfully skirting most cliches, and even those it runs into head-on have a softer impact than they would have, had Oliver Stone directed instead of John Roberts. The film was beautifully photographed by Ton Pierce-Roberts. Stan Winston and company created the convincing *BABE*-like effects. □

Hallie Kate Eisenberg plays Marie, beloved owner of the talking parrot.



LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

HELL TO PAY

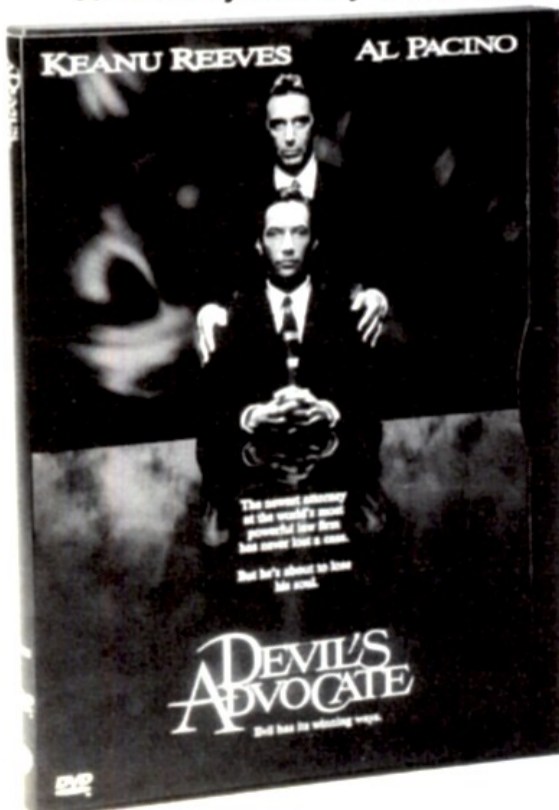
The Devil rides out on two new disc releases.

Every era has tried to find an explanation for Evil. Some have postulated a Manichean view of the universe, in which Evil exists as a separate entity, an absolute force with the same integrity as Good, rather than as deriving from choices that mankind sometimes makes. The Devil has long been the symbol of Evil, the wily tempter who knows how to appeal to our vanity to fool us into making bad choices with dire consequences. Such is the subject of some recent, special laser and DVD releases.

ROSEMARY'S BABY (Paramount), long acknowledged as a horror classic, was one of the company's earliest laserdisc releases. As such, it has long been overdue for a remastering, which it has finally received, at last presenting the film in widescreen with both digital sound and chapter encoding. It was perhaps the first horror film to posit the existence of a world where the Devil existed, but God did not, as well as a horror success that eschewed the old gothic trappings, instead presenting its horrors realistically in a modern-day setting. Despite its outré elements, **ROSEMARY'S BABY** remains a very credible character piece.

It was also the best horror film with which producer William Castle was ever associated (he purchased the rights to Ira Levin's novel after reading the galley), as

The DVD release of **THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** features audio commentary from Taylor Hackford.



Long considered a horror classic, **ROSEMARY'S BABY** (with Sidney Blackmer and Mia Farrow) has recently been remastered on laserdisc.

well as one of Polish emigré Roman Polanski's finest features. Levin cannily built upon the pregnancy paranoia of Rosemary (Mia Farrow), while those around her offer endless advice on how to best take care of herself and her forthcoming child. What if those peculiar people next door were really satanists who intend to use the child for one of their rites? Or is it all simply in Rosemary's increasingly disturbed mind?

Part of the subject of the film is vanity, as Rosemary's actor-husband Guy (John Cassavetes), receives a lucky career break that might be connected with black magic. Polanski is very effective at delineating character and building up tension over things half-seen. The old Dakota building provides creepy atmosphere, as do the antics of the nosy neighbors (Sidney Blackmer and Ruth Gordon, the latter winning an Oscar for best supporting actress). Polanski, as an in-joke, has Victoria Vetri, who is billed in the credits under her then-pseudonym Angela Dorian, play a character who says she is always being mistaken for Italian actress Victoria Vetri, before she dies as an apparent suicide.

In a disturbing dream, Rosemary imagines that she is aboard a yacht with a Kennedy-like clan and that her husband has been transformed into Satan. The condescension of males towards women is made a major theme of

the story as Rosemary becomes confused about where to turn with her mounting fears. Ultimately, Rosemary accepts her role as the mother of a disturbing child with peculiar eyes (never shown, though Polanski does superimpose the eyes of its bestial father, Satan, on the scene), providing audiences with some things to discuss at the end of the film, a quality still rare in the horror field.

ROSEMARY'S BABY is not very frightening, but it is a masterfully made film worthy of this remastered presentation. Perhaps, Paramount will finally get around to a disc release of Polanski's subsequent amusing and underrated horror thriller, **THE TENANT**.

The DVD of **THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** (Warner Bros) is a special edition. Though there was a rumor that, as part of a settlement to prevent a lawsuit, the film's ending would be altered for home video, instead a disclaimer appears on the box: "The large white statue of human forms on the wall of John Milton's penthouse in **DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** is not connected in any way and was not endorsed by the sculptor Frederick Hart or the Washington National Cathedral, joint copyright owners of the Cathedral sculpture "Ex Nihilo" in Washington, D.C." A similar-looking statue comes to life near the end, providing the film with one of its neatest visual effects; another disclaimer is ap-

ended at the end of the credits.

The DVD not only offers a sharper, widescreen "scope"-shaped picture; it also features production notes, 5 theatrical trailers, 2 TV spots, English and French soundtracks, generally accurate subtitles in English, French, and Spanish, and extensive running commentary by director Taylor Hackford (though much of his rambling talk simply tells us what we can already see for ourselves).

Also included are a half-hour's worth of extended scenes, which are mostly seen in the picture in shortened form. These present a bit more philosophizing from John Milton (Al Pacino playing a Nietzschean devil as streetwise attorney), and help establish that Eddie Barzoom (Jeffrey Jones)'s position in Milton's law firm is in jeopardy and that hotshot attorney Kevin Lomax (Keanu Reeves in a better than average performance) can't help flirting with any attractive woman in reach, despite his generally happy marriage to Mary Ann (Charlize Theron).

Pacino turned down the part of Milton five times until Hackford had ultimate writer Tony Gilford do a page one rewrite to provide a story that has more substance than special effects. Hackford is especially proud of his attention to detail in shooting on location, persuading a few of New York's power players to make cameos, and is effective at establishing the arrogance of conspicuous consumers. Unfortunately, his commentary briefly notes that lack of support he felt from his producer without elaborating on it, preferring to extol the design (which is indeed sumptuous) and the acting. One peculiarity is that the extended scene version of Eddie Barzoom's funeral is slugged "Eddie Barzoom's Bar Mitzvah" on the disc.

At its heart, **DEVIL'S ADVOCATE** is a \$57 million morality fable about vanity and moral choice. Hackford is not as effective at building up tension and atmosphere as Polanski, but Pacino is more fun to watch hamming it up than Ruth Gordon was (though one misses the power and subtlety of his earlier, better performances). From the beginning, Lomax is presented with a moral choice: does he do the right thing when he real-

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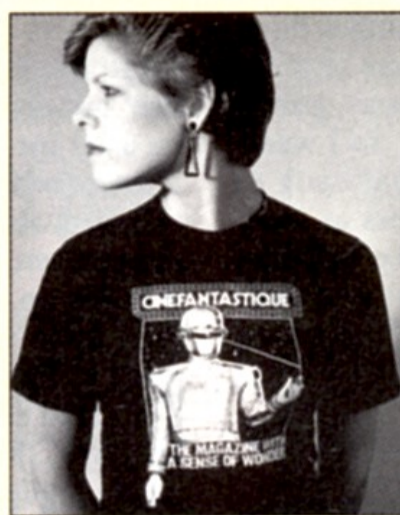
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izes a child molester he represents is guilty, or does he break down a vulnerable child witness to get the scumbag off, thus maintaining his perfect record of wins in court? Pacino's *Devil* keeps presenting Lomax with choices that his professional pride will not allow him to refuse, so that Lomax is always maintaining his free will and is made aware of the possibility of having taken a different path.

Like Guy Woodhouse, Kevin is so caught up in his career that he ignores his wife, who descends into madness while Kevin abandons her to pursue a high profile murder case with duplicitous participants. Hackford wants us to know that there are consequences to our choices and moral compromises, and finishes the film by establishing that even if one temptation is defeated, another will inevitably arise.

One final examination of evil worth noting is John Woo's *FACE/OFF* (Paramount), which is a real return to form for the Hong Kong action auteur. The laserdisc features a fine widescreen transfer with superb surround sound to help pump up the excitement of the already thrilling action sequences. It echoes Woo's greatest success *THE KILLER* in featuring a matched pair, FBI agent Sean

Archer (John Travolta in one of his finest performances) and terrorist Castor Troy (Nicolas Cage), who are two sides of the same coin: strong, commanding characters, who take extreme pride in their professional skills.

Archer is the good guy, but his profession has required that he too neglects his family. The movie's ingenious science-fiction premise has the pair switching faces and identities, so we get the spectacle of Cage imitating Travolta and Travolta imitating Cage. More than a gimmick, this concept adds a richness and complexity that puts the film above most action fare. The story remains focused on the souls of the main characters: as much as Archer has reason to hate Troy, Troy inadvertently exposes Archer's shortcomings and aids his becoming a better father and husband; and, in a neat bit of symmetry, Archer winds up adopting Troy's orphaned son, replacing his own son, whom Troy accidentally killed during an assassination attempt on Archer.

What distinguishes Woo's work is that not only is he a dynamic director of action sequences, but he also injects powerful emotions into his narratives. His characters are killers, but this does not prevent them from having deep passions and feelings for oth-

ers that border on the melodramatic, providing an emotional core that gives the material resonance and increases audience interest. We want the peripheral characters to break through the lies, distrust and mixed messages, for the family to recognize the true father whatever his features, and for order to be restored, and Woo does not disappoint us.

ANGELS

continued from page 49

Scorsese's thoughtful *TEMPTATION OF CHRIST*, the devil himself appears to a crucified Jesus as a young Cherub, pulling the spikes from his wrists and feet on the cross, telling Christ that he was sent from God to announce that his son doesn't have to suffer or die anymore. That scene leads into a "fantasy" portion of the film that has Jesus living a moral, married and adulterous life and almost dying of old age until he realizes that the vision is all a trick of the devil, his "last temptation," which he renounces seconds before he dies on the cross. Ironically, it was this "temptation" portion of the film that had religious zealots up in arms. Had they actually seen the film and realized that the objectionable scenes were manifestations of the devil (which Jesus ultimately renounces), they might

have been more understanding of what the film was trying to do.

Evil angels are also the subject of the recently released *FALLEN*. Part supernatural thriller, part cop drama, the film has Denzel Washington (who played an angel himself in *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*) chasing down a fallen angel who can inhabit the bodies of humans and continue to live.

Archangels seem to hold a particular fascination for Hollywood screenwriters. Two polar examples of archangel films were released within the last three years. The antithesis of Nora Ephron's *MICHAEL*, in which John Travolta plays a self-indulgent archangel on his last trip to earth, is *THE PROPHECY* in which Christopher Walken turns the image of the archangel Michael on its head, portraying him as a human-hating, jealous lout, less sympathetic than the devil himself, whom he ultimately confronts (with unexpected results) in the desert during the film's finale.

The need to continue to explore the notion of angels is strong, and no doubt, a host of new films will crop up as the millennium approaches. How else would you explain, as the Angel Seth asked of the agnostic heart surgeon in *CITY OF ANGELS*, "the enduring myth of Heaven"?

DR WHO

continued from page 55

ployed for DOCTOR WHO tended to be larger than life characters—I don't know if I was one, but that's how I tended to view the others, anyway. So they filled the roll of the Doctor, because it was kind of an empty space in the script, apart from the words they had to say, and the actor came along with his personality and filled that space."

This necessitated a certain flamboyance in the performance. "That was one of the ingredients in the Doctor, and in a way that's why the kept changing actors—it gave it an interest, because a new eccentricity would come along."

Still, while bringing something new, McCoy was conscious of the character's history. "I also wanted—because there were six other Doctors before me—to be a multifaceted Doctor myself. If there were any moments that I thought were a Patrick Troughton moment or a John Pertwee moment or a Tom Baker moment or whatever, I would think of that and, in thinking of that, hopefully bring a little of them into that moment. That's why my Doctor was comedic, I think; that was a bit like Patrick Troughton. If he was a bit crabby and bad-tempered sometimes, that was like William Hartnell. Sometimes he was aloof and mysterious; sometimes he was a bit dangerous, like Colin Baker."

Besides a changing personality, each new Doctor also had a different look. Did the actor have any influence over the costume? "Yes, I did," said McCoy. "I actually wore my own hat. I went to see the producer, and my hat was like that. He said, 'Oh, I like that.' I said, 'Well, if you're going to put the hat in DOCTOR WHO, you've got to have me with it.' So that's how I got the roll: they cast the hat, but I went with the hat!"

"That was the beginning of the costume," he continued. "I wanted a Chekovian professor type, and also I wanted big pockets, because I wanted somewhere to keep the script—that's how it came to be. The walking stick was my idea, because I liked the idea of working with a walking stick. The question mark pullover wasn't my idea; that was the producer's. He had to have his say."

By the time McCoy came to the role, the character was a familiar icon, not the object of mystery he had originally been. "So much had been written about The Doctor that a lot of the mystery had disappeared, unlike the original first Doctor, and the second Doctor as well—they were more mysterious characters. So what I want-

ed to do was bring back that mystery. Luckily, the script editor was of the same mind. The other thing was the first Doctor was slightly more dangerous, in a way, partly because of the mystery, so I wanted to try and bring that back to it—and a slight darkness as well. When you bring mystery, then that can happen—darkness and danger. That's what we were working towards." □

THE BEYOND REVIEW

continued from page 57

Lovecraftian Crawling Chaos overwhelming life as we know it, until there is nowhere left for the characters to run, except into the bowels of Hell itself.

This finale, though obviously achieved on a low-budget, is nicely realized. With but a single set and a hazy effect above the skyline to imply an endless horizon, Fulci conveys an apparently infinite monotony of deserted nothingness; plus, the imagery comes full circle, dissolving back to a painting seen in the prologue, at last clarifying what the artist Schweik (Antoine Saint-John) was attempting to portray. Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that the characters who suffer this fate have done nothing to deserve it. (It's not quite clear whether this Hell is personal experience only for the two leads or whether the entire world will soon follow.) This is a film in which no power of Good presents itself, and there seems to be no way to stop the advent of Hell once the Gate has been opened. In an intriguing, climactic image, MacColl and Warbeck sport contact lenses similar to those worn by Antonella Interlenghi as the blind Emily. The apparent conclusion is that they have been struck blind; however, they are not acting as if blinded, but are continuing to stare at the Hellish landscape surrounding them. What is really happening? Earlier, Emily had made the cryptic statement that the blind "see things more clearly." Perhaps her pupil-less eyes do not really signify blindness; perhaps this is what happens when one's sight is blasted by a glimpse into The Beyond.

One small note of praise for the cast: In a film like this, not much is required of the actors in terms of characterization, so it helps to have some kind of inherent appeal or likability. Both Warbeck and MacColl fill the bill. Though hardly allowed to deliver tour-de-force performances, they nevertheless face the proceedings as seriously as possible, never descending into camp or winking at the audience.

Wretchedly mangled in its original U.S. release, THE BEYOND has long deserved a resur-

rection in restored form. (Unfortunately, the print screened for the press was somewhat faded and scratchy, although otherwise intact, not the pristine print that will be used for striking the laserdisc.) I do not wish to extol the virtues of this film too loudly, because it is not perfect; in some ways, in fact, it holds up better on recollection than upon viewing, allowing the mind to free-associate between its disjointed elements. From this perspective, the film achieves an almost unique sense of metaphysical horror through its portrayal of disconnected, disastrous events beyond human control or understanding. THE BEYOND remains a graphic gore film that will put off squeamish viewers, but also it contains dark notions that are genuinely disconcerting. □

RESURRECTING FULCI

continued from page 57

horror film, and personal favorite, BEATRICE CENCI ('69). ("It sounds strange," said Antonella, "but I think learning how to make people laugh helped him know how to scare them.") He followed with a series of thrillers, including ONE ON TOP OF THE OTHER ('69), LIZARD IN A WOMAN'S SKIN ('71), and SEVEN NOTES IN BLACK (aka THE PSYCHIC, '77). "For me these three are like jewels," said his daughter. "The first is pure thriller: not one drop of blood, but frightening. It is maybe my favorite among my father's movies."

Fulci's golden era began when ZOMBI, Dario Argento's cut of George Romero's DAWN OF THE DEAD, became a European sensation. It created a cottage industry of Italian imitators, first and foremost of which was Fulci's 1979 ZOMBIE. Filmed for a reported \$500,000, it earned some 30 million internationally. Several European successes followed: THE GATES OF HELL ('80), THE BEYOND, and 1981's HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY. Then came 1982's NEW YORK RIPPER. Featuring a razor-wielding maniac slicing a woman's nipple and eyeball, it was a widely reviled, major flop.

At the same time, Italy's film industry collapsed. With few exceptions, Fulci's subsequent career was no-budget dreck such as the 1984 disco-slasher movie, MURDER ROCK. "It was a time of total crisis in the film business in Italy," recalled Antonella. "My father was a total workaholic. He wanted nothing but to work, so sometimes he had to take very bad offers. Using all his strength, even when he was ill."

ZOMBI 3, which the ailing director disowned after walking off the set in disgust, seemed to spell the end of his career. Fulci wrote several books but was largely retired when cult interest in his work led to several horror convention appearances. "I went to Euro-Fest in London with him," said Antonella. "Thousands of people were waiting to see him. He was always very happy to be with the young people. He didn't want to admit he was getting old. He was kid inside. They never grow up. If they did, they couldn't make these films."

The events led to talk of a comeback film, WAX MASK, to be produced by Dario Argento. "He was very close to making it," said Antonella. "I know he was very happy to work again, and excited about it. If not, he would not have thrown all his energy into that project, for his health was very bad." The problems endemic to the Italian film industry delayed production for two years. Fulci was a mere three weeks from filming WAX MASK when he died in his bed from a diabetic attack. "5 minutes before he passed, we were joking and laughing together," recalled his daughter. "The thing I miss most is to listen to him. He always had ideas for new movies, even when his health was very bad. These movies—they were the best days of his life."

Catriona reflected, "I remember wondering why he was churning out all these movies, when I think he might have had a real masterpiece in him. I don't know if he knew how to stop. I don't think anyone ever fathomed the mystery of Lucio. I often felt he was a fairly shy man. I don't recall anyone who seemed to know him well personally. He wouldn't let one. All this screaming would go on, but it was all rather exterior. A wall, I suppose, between him and everyone else. It would have been interesting to find out just what made him tick—what the source was of these strange, dark demons he liked to put on the screen. He was an extraordinary character." □

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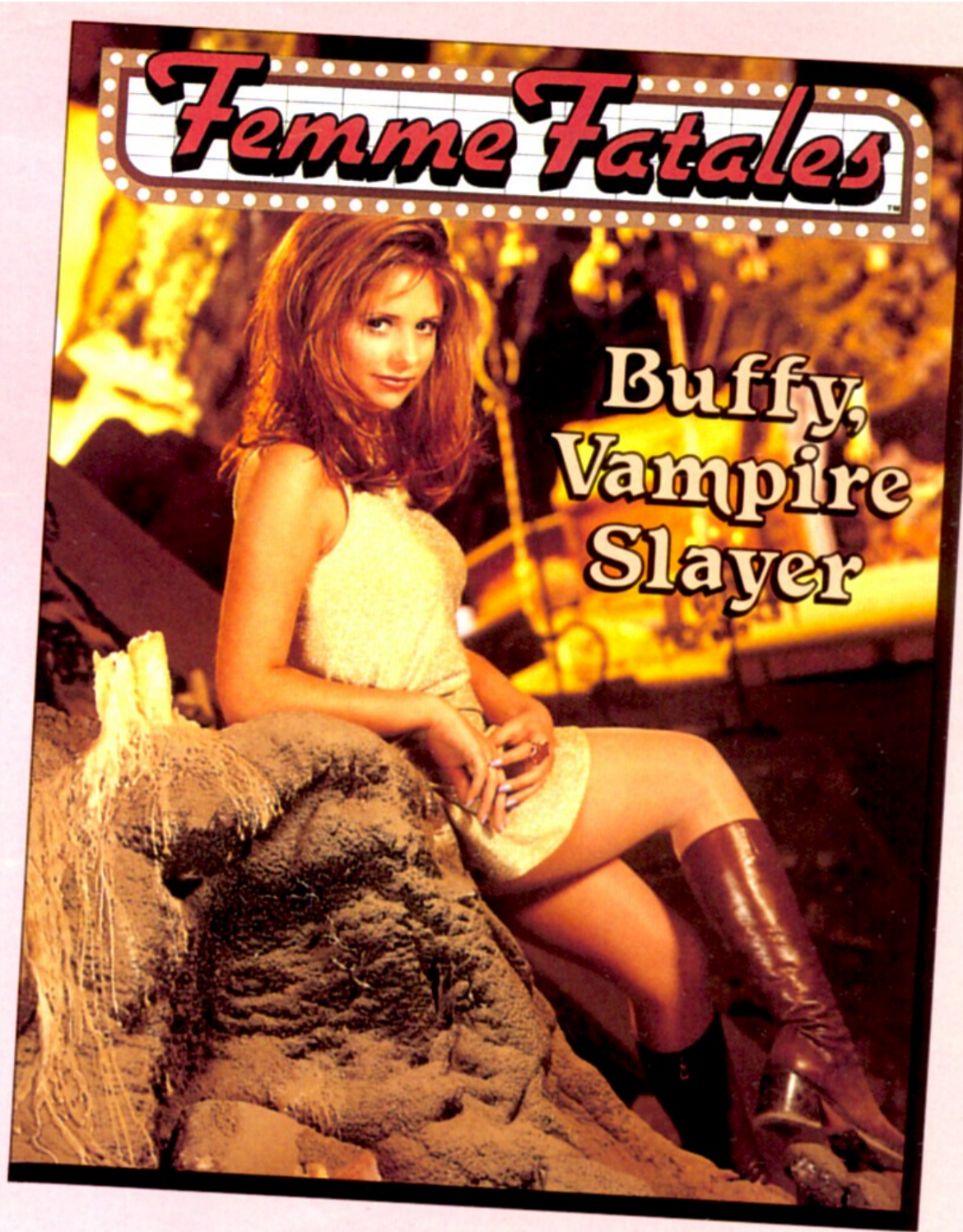
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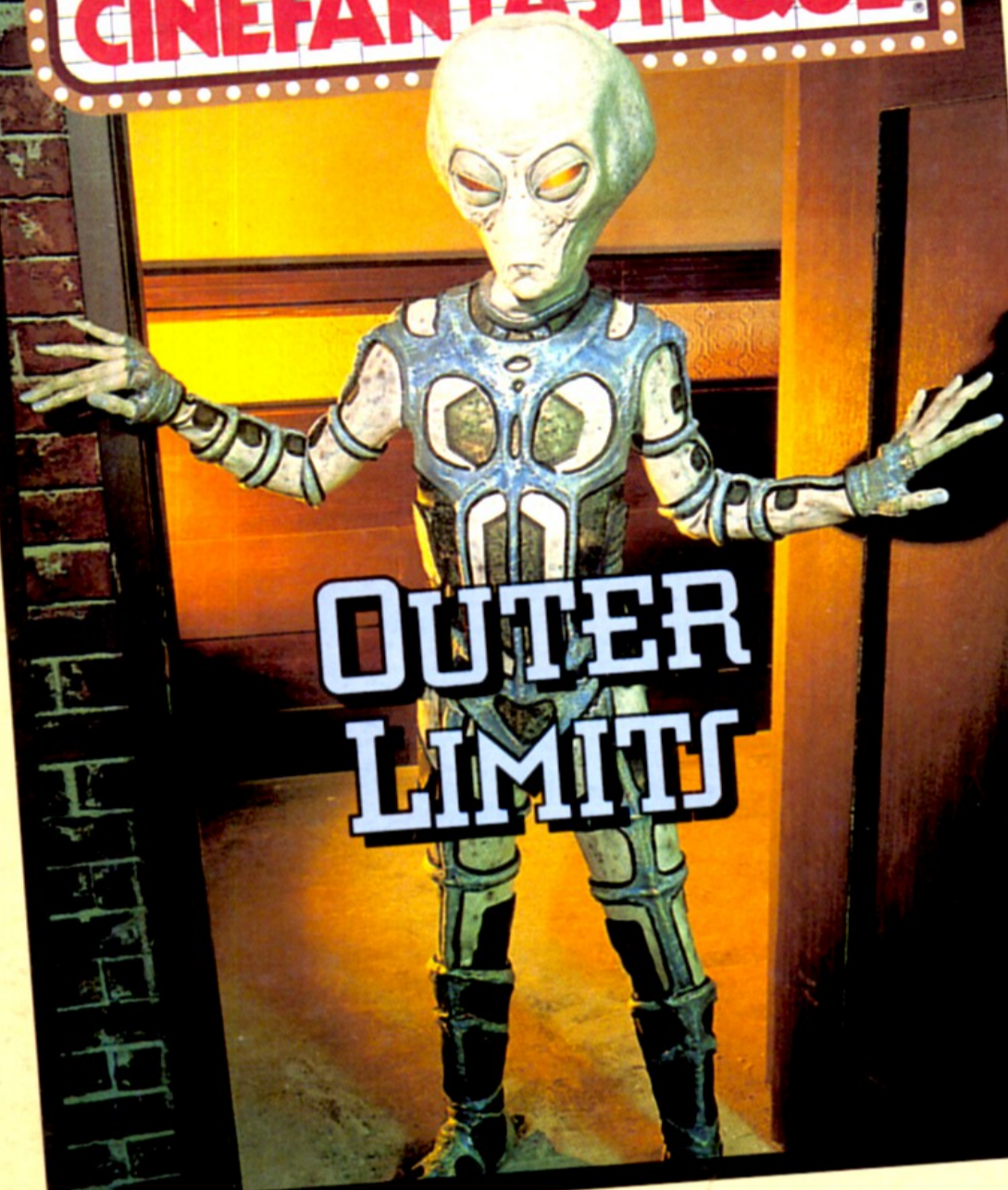
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